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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the role of the teacher in student-led literature circles by comparing the types of comments that students made when the teacher was and was not present. Comments were analyzed using specific Essential Academic Learning Requirements (Washington State, 1997) in reading and four other categories including text support, conversation maintenance, off task remarks, or comments made by the teacher. Subjects participated in two different sets of literature circle groups which lasted 6 weeks each. Sixteen discussions were audiotaped and coded. Results indicate that all discussions had the largest number of comments in the categories of comprehension of story ideas and details and reading for literary experience. Groups which met without the teacher made more off-task comments. This study concludes that the teacher's role will vary based upon students' skills and learning needs. Thirteen appendixes are included. (Contains 34 references.) (Author/SM)

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Exploring the Role of the Teacher in Student-Led Literature Circles

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June 2000

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the role of the teacher in student-led literature circles by comparing the types of comments that students made when the teacher was and was not present. Comments were analyzed using specific Essential Academic Learning Requirements (Washington State, 1997) in reading and four other categories including text support, conversation maintenance, off task remarks or comments made by the teacher. Subjects participated in two different sets of literature circle groups which lasted six weeks each. Sixteen discussions were audio taped and coded. Results indicated that all discussions had the largest number of comments in the categories of comprehension of story ideas and details, and reading for literary experience. Groups which met without the teacher made more off task comments. This study concludes that the teacher's role will vary based upon students' skills and learning needs.

Exploring the Role of the Teacher in Student-Led Literature Circles

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Research emphasizes the value of students responding to literature in real contexts. Some teachers are transforming their classrooms into communities of learners who read literature, write about it, and discuss its meaning in literature discussion groups. Danielson (1992) states that, "Literature discussion groups as a vehicle for discussion and responding to literature have recently received much attention as an alternative to basal reading groups" (p. 372). Teachers are beginning to put literature discussion groups into practice in their own classrooms as the value of this instructional strategy has become increasingly discovered. In the book Literature Circles and Response (Hill, Johnson & Noe,1995) the benefits of using literature discussion groups in the classroom are cited. Literature circles...

- promote a love for literature and positive attitudes toward reading
- reflect a constructivist, child-centered model of literacy
- encourage extensive and intensive reading
- invite natural discussions that lead to student inquiry and critical thinking
- support diverse response to texts
- foster interaction and collaboration
- provide choice and encourage responsibility
- expose children to literature from multiple perspectives
- nurture reflection and self-evaluation (p. 3)

In addition to these benefits, teachers in Washington State can meet a large number of Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) (1997) in reading, writing and communication in the context of literature circles. For example, the EALRs state that students will understand the meaning of what is read, and to do this they will "comprehend important ideas and details, expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information

and ideas, and think critically and analyze authors' use of language, style, purpose, and perspective" (p. 19). All of those objectives can be addressed in the setting of literature circles. The writing EALRs state that students will write for different purposes and present analytical responses to literature and write persuasively. When students respond to literature in response logs and discuss their personal reactions to texts, they are practicing those writing EALRs. Finally, in the area of communication students are doing all four of the major EALRs which include listening, observing, communicating clearly and effectively, using communication strategies, and evaluating the effectiveness of their communication.

Understanding the value of literature discussion groups, I have incorporated them into my own fourth and fifth grade classroom in the past. As the teacher, I knew that the role I played in literature discussion groups was important, but I was not sure of the exact role that I should take during discussions. Should I act as the facilitator and help the flow of the discussion, or should I actively participate in discussions and be more of an equal member of the group by sharing a response to the book too? Or, instead of facilitating or participating, should I monitor groups from a distance? My attempts to organize and facilitate four to five literature groups reading different books at the same time disappointed me. I found it difficult to keep up with the reading for every group. I could not meet with groups fast enough and had difficulty sticking to a consistent schedule when I only met with one to two groups a day. Finally, I was concerned that when one group was meeting and talking, it was disruptive to other students who were trying to work more independently at the same time. The interest that I have in literature discussion groups and the challenges that I have encountered when using them in my classroom are what led me to this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the role that I play in literature circle groups by analyzing what students say when I am or am not present. The method of study used is a multiple case study design. I observed several groups in order to discover patterns or explanations for what occurred in discussion

groups when I was and was not present, using reading EALRs as a unit of measurement. Student-led literature discussion groups are defined generally as groups in which students meet to cooperatively discuss literature in order to expand their comprehension and understanding of literature and how it connects to their lives.

Questions that Guided this Study

As a teacher who wanted to know more about the teacher's role in student-led literature discussion groups, I had some specific questions to guide my study.

1. How does my presence as the teacher, or the lack of my presence, affect students' literature circle discussions? Is it possible to monitor all groups at the same time?
2. What strategies help students develop more independence in literature circles?
3. Can students successfully achieve a number of the reading EALRs in the context of student-led literature discussion groups? How can I know when students have met those EALRs? What evidence can be used?

These questions guided me towards a deeper understanding of my role in literature circles and how students were able to perform when I was and was not present.

Definitions of Terms

In order to understand this study, it will be helpful to know some terms as they relate to my research.

Cooperative learning groups. Cooperative learning groups as defined by Johnson and Johnson (1992) involve "working together to accomplish shared goals. [It is] the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (p. 174). Those researchers further explain that students involved in cooperative learning groups have the responsibility of learning the assigned material and to keep other members of the group accountable for doing so also.

Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) (Touchstone Applied Sciences Associates, Inc., 1995). This is a reading test that is given to students at the beginning and ending of the year in the district in which I work. Students are given non-fiction text passages with missing words, and they are to select the best word choice to go in the missing word blank. This test is used to show the level of comprehension that students have of non-fiction text. In this study the DRP scores will be helpful in providing a description of students involved.

Level of response. Level of response refers to the level at which students respond to the text that they are reading. Degrees of responses are classified according to the response rubric that was developed with the use of Vandergrift's Classification of Response (1990) (Appendix J) and the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (1997).

Literature-based curriculum. This refers to a curriculum in which literary works, usually books other than basal readers that are used for reading instruction, are the dominant materials for instruction, especially in the language arts (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Reading response logs, or response logs: These are journals in which students record their thoughts, ideas and opinions about what they have read. Students are encouraged to write down thoughts or feelings during or after the reading. Students are provided with a framework for what to include in their response logs early in the year. Possible prompts for writing are provided by the teacher, but students always have the choice to write what they choose to write in response to the text they read. Reed (1988) explains that reading logs are learning tools in which teachers can avoid having students say, "Isn't that what you wanted me to say?" (p. 52). Reed explains that the difference in instruction is that with reading logs, she "[stands] under a fresh waterfall of student writing that springs from their own thinking, thinking that leads to further writing - better writing, in fact, than [she used to get] (p. 52)."

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory. Rosenblatt (1978) considers the reader's role in the reading process as critical to developing an understanding of and response to the text. Rosenblatt (1978) explains that there are two streams

of response are involved in any reading-event -the evocation and the response. Evocation is the first stream of response which occurs during the "initial reading phase in which the reader responds to verbal signs in the text and constructs or organizes his responses into an experienced meaning which for him is 'the work'" (Harris et al., 1995, p. 48). The second stream of response is the evaluation or analysis in which "a concurrent stream of feelings, attitudes, and ideas is aroused by the very work being summoned up under guidance of the text" (p. 48). Rosenblatt's theory is interpreted by Villaume and Hopkins (1995). These researchers state, "The meanings that readers construct from literature vary due to differences in what readers bring to the text. Rosenblatt's use of the term transactions is adopted to refer to the dynamic ways in which text and reader come together as meaning is constructed" (p.190). The experience and understanding that readers bring to the literature discussion group greatly affect students' responses and the outcome of the discussion.

Running records. Running records were named and developed by Marie Clay (1990). She describes them in the following way: "Teachers can take a lasting record of how the child reads short, whole stories, making notes of strengths and challenges as they occur. They can return to these to analyze or think about what the child is doing and how best the teaching can interact with what a child can do" (p. 291). Running records involve a set of rules about how to record what students read and include a description of how the student retells what happened in the story. These retellings help the teacher to evaluate the student's comprehension of the text.

Scaffolding. Scaffolding is related to Vygotsky's social development theory. This theory is summarized by McMahon and Goatley (1995): "First, Vygotsky argued that instead of merely reflecting thought, language develops higher order thinking because learning occurs first on a social plane and only then is it internalized. Second Vygotsky contended that learning occurs with the help of a 'more knowledgeable other' who facilitates growth through instruction within the learner's 'zone of proximal development'" (p.23). These two concepts of the social plane and 'more knowledgeable other' encompass the social theory of

development. In general, the range of that which can be learned with the guidance of an adult or peer collaboration is greater than what can be learned alone.

Student centered discussion. This refers to literature discussion groups which revolve around students' responses to the literature. In contrast to traditional basal reading programs which are based upon pre-determined questions and responses, this method places more value upon students' thinking and understanding about the text. Student centered discussion is different than teacher-led discussions which involve more utterances and questions by the teacher.

Student-led literature groups. Student-led literature groups are cooperative learning groups that students meet in after reading a portion of the same piece of literature. Students use their written responses from their reading response logs in order to share their ideas and thoughts about the text. The purpose of these groups is for students to expand their comprehension and understanding of literature and how it connects to their own lives. Almasi (1995) summarizes the learning goals of student-led literature groups: "The instructional goals for students within such contexts [focus] on learning how to (a) interact with others in a manner that [fosters] meaningful interpretation of literature, (b) become a support structure for one another as they [attempt] to interpret literature and construct meaning, and (c) set agendas for discussing literature and for interacting with one another in conversational manner" (p. 319-320).

Vandergrift's Classification of Responses. This classification involves a hierarchy that will be used to analyze student responses. In her description of Vandergrift's Classification, Rickey (1992) states, "This taxonomy illustrates the developmental nature of response beginning with personal responses and culminating in what [Vandergrift] suggests are higher levels of interpretive and evaluative responses" (p. 53). There are six levels of response according to Vandergrift. The first is personal, which includes subjective or affective responses based upon thoughts, feelings, memories or beliefs. Next is a descriptive response where readers remember the story and may tell who, what,

where, when, or why. A third classification is classificatory in which readers identify a piece of literature as a certain genre, place a work in a literary or historical context, or compare or contrast the work to other pieces of literature. The fourth category is analytic. "In analytic responses readers identify literary elements integral to the text such as language, structure, [and] point of view" (Rickey, 1992, p. 54). Interpretive responses constitute the fifth level of response according to Vandergrift. Interpretive comments make inferences, interpret meaning, or make a connection between the text and bodies of knowledge such as psychology or sociology. Finally, evaluative responses are the highest levels of response in this particular taxonomy. This level involves a judgement from the reader based upon personal, literary, social or moral criteria.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations. This study confined itself to observing discussion groups when I was and was not present. In the first set of literature groups, I observed students as a non-participant and collected data on two literature discussion groups. In the second round of literature groups I acted as a participant in all four literature groups during every other group meeting. I collected data on all four groups during the second round of literature groups. This study focused on which reading EALRs were met by students during the literature discussions. The comments that I made during the discussions were not analyzed because I wanted to see how my role, rather than specific comments I made, affected students' discussions. I did not look at gender roles, the effect of reading ability, or book selection on the quality of discussion or response. I also did not analyze the percent of individual responses during the discussions, so I did not show which comments were made by which students. I was more interested in the group's conversation when I was or was not present, and the effect that I had on the group when I was present. Another delimitation of the study was the effect the tape recorder had on student performance in groups. At times the recorder was a distraction while at other times it helped keep the group on task because they were aware that I listened to their conversations on tape.

Limitations. This primarily qualitative study presented limitations. Since I was the teacher and the researcher, the data may be biased although an outside professional educator verified my results. Since this study was done in my own classroom, I may have been unable to see factors which affected the study. My relationship with the students may have affected the outcome of the study as well. Several students who participated in the study were my students for the third year in a row, while others were brand new to me. I knew the students that I had taught for the two previous years very well, while I was not as familiar with the students who were new to my classroom. There is the possibility that I could have given more credit to the students that I had previously taught.

The procedure for selecting students to participate in the study affects the generalizability of my findings to other classrooms because I only worked with the students in my own classroom. My classroom population was unique because four out of the 24 students were below the district reading level expectations for fourth or fifth grade. That means that 20 students were at grade level according to district expectations at the start of this study. Other classrooms will be dealing with different numbers of students who have reading difficulties and who have special learning needs. In my classroom only one student had an individual education plan (IEP) at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year three students had IEPs. Throughout the entire year I had five students who qualified for and participated in the Highly Capable Learners Program (HCLP). These limitations of my study make it generalizable to only classrooms with similar characteristics.

Review of Literature

The following review of literature considers the educational elements that are related to literature circles in the classroom. The topics covered involve the learning and teaching style related to literature groups, roles within literature discussion groups, the importance of valuing students' responses to texts, what to look for in a quality discussion, and educational reform in Washington state. This analysis of literature provides a broad view of learning and includes elements that

are specific to literature circles. Teaching with literature circles encompasses many learning theories which are represented in this review.

Social Learning

The importance of social interaction as a key to learning was emphasized by a social researcher named Lev S. Vygotsky (McMahon & Goatley, 1995). Vygotsky's social development theory examined the importance of social interaction in students' social and cognitive development. McMahon and Goatley (1995) summarized Vygotsky's theory by saying, "First, Vygotsky argued that instead of merely reflecting thought, language develops higher order thinking because learning occurs first on a social plane and only then is it internalized. Second, Vygotsky contended that learning occurs with the help of a 'more knowledgeable other,'" either an adult or a more knowledgeable peer, "who facilitates growth through instruction within the learner's 'zone of proximal development'" (p.23). Heterogeneously mixed literature discussion groups led by students provide opportunities for social interaction and the development of higher level thinking skills as students scaffold each others' learning.

Vygotsky (1978) states, "The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (p. 86). He explains the zone of proximal development to be: "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). In my classroom I use literature circles as a place in which students experience the support of other peers, and the teacher, in order to develop in their ability to comprehend text, or make meaning out of what they read.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is directly related to social learning because students are communicating in a social environment in order to learn. In cooperative learning groups students work together to accomplish shared goals. Johnson and

Johnson (1992) suggest that there are different uses for cooperative learning in the classroom including the "teaching of specific content, to ensure active cognitive processing of information during a lecture, and to provide long-term support and assistance for academic progress" (p. 174). Johnson and Johnson provide five things for teachers to do when using cooperative learning groups in the classroom: 1) Specify the objectives for the lesson; 2) Make a number of pre-instructional decisions such as the size of the groups, roles for group members, materials needed and the way that the room should be arranged; 3) Explain the task using specific criteria and how students need to work together; 4) Monitor students' learning and intervene within the groups to provide task assistance or to increase students' interpersonal and group skills; and 5) Evaluate students' learning and help students process how well their groups functioned.

Johnson and Johnson (1992) state the importance of teachers knowing how to use cooperative learning in the classroom:

> Cooperative learning is here to stay. Because it is based on a profound and strategic theory and there is substantial research validating its effectiveness, there probably will never be a time in the future when cooperative learning is not used extensively within educational programs. It is important, therefore, that educators understand the different approaches to implementing cooperative learning. (p.176)

These suggestions for using cooperative learning groups applies to literature discussion groups because students work together to accomplish the goal of understanding and making sense of literature. It is essential for students to keep each other accountable for the learning accomplished in group because each student has something unique to contribute to the group. Also, students need to be responsible for learning to occur when the teacher is and is not present.

Stevens and Slavin (1995) state, "For cooperative learning to have an effect on achievement two conditions [are] essential: group goals and individual accountability. Group goals motivate students to help their group mates learn... [and] individual accountability...increases the probability that all students will learn

and reduces the potential for a *free rider effect*" (p. 322). Their article summarizes the results of a two year study called the cooperative elementary school model which used "cooperation as an overarching philosophy to change school and classroom organization and instructional processes" (p. 321). A cooperative elementary school model uses cooperative learning across subject matter, mainstreamed classrooms, peer coaching, cooperative planning by teachers, and parents helping in the school. Results of this study showed that after the first year of the study, reading vocabulary increased. After the second year of the study, the results were greater. Students achieved significantly higher than other schools in these areas: reading vocabulary; reading comprehension; language expression; math computation; and math application. Social relationships were improved and students with disabilities were more accepted by other students. These results exemplify the benefits of applying cooperative learning in the schools and classrooms.

Literature Discussion Groups

For many teachers, the nature of teaching reading has changed into instruction that is based upon literature. In classrooms which value a literature-based approach, literature discussion groups are used as a way for students to understand and make meaning out of what they read. These groups are also often called literature circles, book clubs, or literature groups. Hill, Johnson and Noe (1995) explain that literature discussion groups are "groups in which children meet regularly to talk about books" (p.2). They explain,

> Groups are determined by book choices; [they] are heterogeneous and include a range of interests and abilities. A whole class may read one book in common, or groups of students may read different titles connected by a theme, by genre, or author. Teachers find that groups of four to six participants are most effective. Intermediate students determine how many pages they will read and gather two or three times each week in their literature [discussion group]. They may share a favorite passage, raise a question, express a personal reaction, or talk about literary elements (p. 2)

The focus of discussion in literature groups is on students' responses to what they have read. Students are required to come to literature group prepared to participate in the discussion. The teacher's role in literature discussion groups has most often been described as that of the facilitator (Danielson, 1992, Routman, 1991) or participant (Scott, 1994). As the facilitator the teacher's main job is to help the discussion flow by suggesting whose turn it is, or by making sure that the conversation sticks to the topic. When a teacher is a participant, s/he attempts to act as a more equal member of the group by sharing his or her response to the literature and modeling questioning about literature and acting as a group member.

The teacher's role in the literature discussion groups has been analyzed more recently as researchers want to know how effective teachers' interactions with students are. Finding the role that works best is a challenge. Koskinen and O'Flahavan (1995) state, "The teacher must find a new role in the group that respects peer leadership and at the same time contributes to the group's social and interpretive development" (p. 354). Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn and Crawford (1999) suggest, "Teacher-watching provides us with the opportunity to carefully examine and reflect on our practice and change our patterns of talk to match the intent of our curriculum and beliefs" (p. 384). In addition to having teachers reflect on their practices, it is important to understand what is happening in groups that are centered around students' ideas.

Student Centered Discussion

There is an abundance of research that supports having literature discussion groups that are based upon students' responses to literature rather than the teacher's questions or ideas. The reasons for focusing discussion around students' ideas rather than the teacher's is that students bring a broad range of ideas to the discussion, they scaffold each others' learning, and develop their ability to resolve sociocognitive conflict.

Goatley, Brock and Raphael (1995) found that students from a range of learning, cultural and social backgrounds benefited from a literature discussion group based upon students' responses. This research sought to answer the

following questions: 1) How do student-led groups provide opportunities for students of differing abilities to participate, and what is the nature of students' participation as they assume different roles, means for negotiation, and responsibilities?; and 2) In relation to literature-based instruction, what opportunities to develop text interpretation occur for students at all levels of learning in student-led discussion groups?

In a mid-western urban K-5 school, Goatley, Brock and Raphael (1995) studied five students of different cultural backgrounds and ability levels who participated in a program which involved literature discussions called Book Clubs. Book Clubs included four components: daily reading, either independently or with a partner or teacher, in which students read the same book selected by the teacher; writing in reader response logs and "think sheets"; a community share time to discuss many different topics together; and finally instruction to support and coach students in their reading, writing and discussion of the books. Students had time to meet in Book Clubs, which were small, heterogeneous groups of students, on a regular basis.

Over a three week period, data was collected in the form of interviews, written questionnaires, field notes, audio tapes and transcripts of Book Club discussions, videotapes of Book Club discussions and students' written work in response to literature. This data was analyzed in order to determine the proportion of turns taken by individual students and the nature of their responses and interaction. The number and type of comments made by different students varied. In general, students used their literature discussion group as a place to identify sources of confusion and to negotiate interpretations of story events. The researchers concluded that Book Clubs were beneficial to all students as they all became meaningfully engaged with literature and learned about literature and about communicating with peers.

A second study done by McMahon and Goatley (1995) involved students who had previously participated in student centered discussion groups and other students who were new to the program. The researchers wanted to find out "how fifth graders with prior experience in student-led literature discussions acted as

'knowledgeable others' for peers whose prior discussion experiences had been teacher led and grounded in a basal reading program" (p.23). At first, all students involved in the literature discussions used the initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) method of conversing and round robin sharing. The IRE method "makes conversation... more akin to recitation than authentic discussion" (Almasi, 1995, p. 318). This method tends to focus students on achieving the correct answer rather than cooperative learning discussions based upon the books. As the students became more experienced there was a shift away from the IRE method towards shared leadership, and book discussions became more conversational rather than following the IRE pattern. The conclusions of this study support the use of literature discussions based on student response, but suggest that the teacher should "provide supportive modeling and scaffolding when peers need additional strategies to help one another" (p. 32). Students who have experience or knowledge can act as the more knowledgeable other, but they need support and instruction from the teacher.

In addition to students acting as the more knowledgeable others and students of all abilities and learning styles participating in discussion groups, student centered literature discussion groups provide the learning necessary for students to improve at resolving sociocognitive conflict. Almasi (1995) defines sociocognitive conflict as the moment when "ideas or notions about a given text are challenged by conflicting information and may be altered as a result of the social interaction that occurs [in literature discussions]" (p.314). Two teaching methods were compared: teacher led discussions which involved the IRE method; and student centered discussion which involved more open discussion. There were strong conclusions in favor of having student centered discussions for reading. Student centered discussions involved more "conflicts with self" which meant that students realized their own misconceptions and began to think more reflectively. Students were more engaged in the reading and there were higher level responses documented in student centered discussion groups as compared to teacher led groups. Students involved in student centered discussion performed better on a test that measured students' abilities to recognize and

resolve sociocognitive conflicts than students who participated in teacher led discussions.

The results of the three studies cited above favor student centered discussion over teacher-led literature discussions. Overall, student centered discussion supports inquiry, multiple interpretations, and shared opinions.

The Teacher's Role in Literature Discussion Groups

Koskinen and O'Flahavan (1999) explored two types of teacher's roles in literature discussion groups that enabled students to take on more responsibility in the discussion group. The first role was scaffolding during the student discussion and the second role was coaching before and after the student discussion. When teachers scaffolded discussions they gave assistance to the group by appraising students' performance and "[adapting] instructional responses in ways that gradually [helped to] develop students' autonomy" (Koskinen & O'Flahavan, 1999, p. 355). Teachers in this role extended students' ideas and thinking. When teachers coached before and after the discussion they focused on assessing students' performance during discussion and taught skills during the opening of the lesson and during debriefing sessions. The researchers determined that teachers ought to adopt the role that is appropriate for the group.

Another research study that analyzed the teacher's role in literature circles was completed by Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn and Crawford (1999). These researchers looked at the influence of the teacher's participation in literature discussion groups. They audio taped discussions when teachers were and were not present in the discussion group. The discussions were transcribed and analyzed using a constant comparative analysis technique. The researchers found that the teacher took on varied roles such as facilitator, participant, mediator, and active listener. All of these teacher roles were concluded to be appropriate, yet the researchers found that teachers tended to hurry conversations, move on too soon, or send unintended messages. In observing student discussions when the teacher was not present, it was found that students applied strategies for talk which were identified as "get going" techniques, students as facilitators, and discussion of topics and issues. One pattern that

researchers found was that all discussion groups "focused on a search for connections in order to make sense of what they were reading" (p. 383). Short et al. (1999) concluded that teacher demonstration and modeling of strategies in meaningful contexts are crucial for successful student led discussions. The researchers encouraged teachers to continue to reflect on their teaching practices in order to effectively guide students in literature discussion.

Almasi and Gambrell in their book Lively Discussions! (1996) explain that the role of the teacher in discussions is to "act more as [a facilitator], scaffolding student interaction and interpretation when needed" (p. 11). They state that teachers "scaffold students' interpretations by encouraging them to provide a rationale for their response" (p. 11). In addition to scaffolding students' learning, Almasi found that when teachers encourage students to share whether they agree or disagree with others' comments, the students assume the rule of evaluator within the discussion. Teacher behavior that helps facilitate a discussion around a focused topic "begins to lead children to richer understandings and interpretations" (p. 11).

Almasi and Gambrell (1996) suggest that there are a variety of roles that the teacher must assume in different situations. At first they suggest that the teacher acts as more of a facilitator in the group. Then when students are "able to function with little monitoring, [a teacher] may wish to join the group as a participant. In this role [teachers] try to expand student responses rather than evaluate them" (p. 186). When a teacher is a participant, s/he has the responsibility to model discussion skills like "listening, questioning, responding and referring to the text for examples and clarification" (p. 186). During the times that groups have trouble staying on task or working together, it is suggested that the teacher take on the role of the coach. As the coach, the teacher may refer the group to previous learning about how to have successful discussions.

Roser & Martinez (1995) explain the role of the teacher in literature circles after having worked extensively in classrooms with literature circle groups. These researchers claim that often teachers have an "either-or mentality" in which they think that they either should leave students alone in literature groups, or strictly

guide and direct the groups. To counteract this either-or thinking, it is suggested that teachers can provide support in a variety of ways for students involved in literature discussion groups. Teachers might "create a sense of community, plan extensive experiences with books, establish a broad thematic context, provide multiple demonstrations of effective book talk, and organize the logistics of the groups" (p. 141). More specific strategies for success in creating an environment that fosters good literature group discussions include:

- Create a sense of community in which students are willing to be vulnerable
- Allow students to have choice in what books they will read so that they are interested
- Provide support for readers who select a difficult book such as reading with a partner, listening to a tape, or have the book read aloud to them
- Relate literature circle books to a larger classroom theme or context
- Use read aloud time for demonstrations about how to talk about books

These strategies for setting up literature circle groups is the first action that teachers should take in setting up a classroom environment for literature discussion groups.

In addition to preparing students for literature groups, teachers have a role in the discussions that students have. Roser & Martinez (1995) suggest benefits to having the teacher present and not having the teacher present. They suggest that teachers need not meet with every group every time, and state, "In circles in which the teacher is not present, students are freer to explore their own agenda and issues from 'kid culture'" (p. 145). Students are allowed time to solve their own problems instead of the teacher jumping in and taking over. Teachers tend to be impatient when students are telling personal stories or discussing their enjoyment in the book that they are reading in their group. Students need time to just "enjoy the book, share their initial responses with one another, build a sense of community, and begin to consider a wider range of possible interpretations and issues" (p. 147).

Roser & Martinez (1995) suggest that "when students in a particular literature circle announce after a day or two that they are finished with their discussion, that is when we know they are ready to move into focused inquiry" (p.147). Focused inquiry is when students' discussion is related to investigating or exploring ideas or questions that have come up based upon the text that they are reading. When students get to this point, this is a good time for teachers to get involved and move students into a more focused dialogue. When participating in the literature discussions, they asked questions of two types. They asked either "'real'questions about issues or events for which we do not have answers and truly want to know what students think" (p. 146), or they ask students to share more or expand on their ideas.

Teachers need to rethink their roles and value what students have to share with each other in literature groups. After showing students what they might do in literature groups, there should be a balance between when the teacher meets with the group, and when they meet alone.

Eeds and Wells (1989) conducted a study in order to investigate what happened during literature circle groups in a fifth and sixth grade classroom when pre-service teachers led students in discussion groups. The students involved in this study were allowed to select the book they wanted to read, and the groups were heterogeneously mixed. Students met twice a week for thirty minutes over a four to five week period. Instead of having the teachers lead the groups with a series of questions, they wanted to see what types of discussions groups would have with a teacher who acted as a participant in the group. The data that was collected was in the form of field notes, transcripts of audio tapes, and journals that the teachers kept.

The findings of this study showed that students had basically four types of talk in which they engaged during the discussions. They discussed to understand the story better, share personal stories, make predictions and inquire about the book, and critique the book by valuing it and evaluating it as literature. Eeds and Wells (1989) concluded that the discussion groups were as successful as groups in which the teacher asked most of the questions in the format of a "gentle

inquisition." However, when the teachers allowed students to explore the reading together with the teacher present as a participant, students collaborated and interacted as a group to create understanding about the book. When the teacher acted as a participant there was a lot of support for students to comprehend the book. In conclusion, Eeds and Wells (1989) state, "If critics and teachers can become... not authorities on meaning, explicators of text, or sources of answers, but simply other readers with whom to talk, then grand conversations about literature may indeed be possible" (p. 28).

The above research makes it clear that the teacher can assume different roles in different situations. Each role, whether it is the coach, facilitator or participant, helps to teach students different skills. Once the teacher has created a classroom climate in which students can read and respond to quality literature, practicing different roles within literature groups will help teachers to decide which roles are best for specific students, and which roles they are most comfortable with.

Reader Response

Since literature discussion groups are based upon student response, Rosenblatt and her transactional response to literature theory is critical to the topic of literature discussion groups. Villaume and Hopkins (1995) interpreted Rosenblatt's theory by noting, "The meanings that readers construct from literature vary due to differences in what readers bring to the text. Rosenblatt's use of the term transactions is adopted to refer to the dynamic ways in which text and reader come together as meaning is constructed" (p.190). The experience and understanding that readers bring to the literature discussion group greatly affect the outcome of the discussion. Response to literature is important because "what is brought to the text influences the meanings readers construct, and what is taken from the text challenges personal assumptions and understandings and encourages readers to clarify their current values, beliefs, and understandings" (p. 191). Villaume and Hopkins extend response to include what happens when readers use discussion to clarify their understandings.

Villaume and Hopkins (1995) asked the following questions: "What types of transactions between text and personal knowledge and experiences appear in the literature discussions of elementary students? Also, how does social dialogue about literature impact on personal response?" The study involved the observation of a fourth grade literature discussion group. Five students of mixed abilities and the teacher in this group met once a week to discuss a common literature book for about 25 minutes. Students wrote in literature response logs and the teacher acted as the facilitator, not the main questioner.

The data collected was in the form of videotapes, transcripts, audio tapes, literature response logs, and students' written comments in response to questions about how they liked the literature discussion groups. Student responses were categorized into four categories: 1) text world, or responses that focused on details in the book; 2) personal world, which included personal responses; 3) improvised world, in which students altered either the text or real world circumstances in their discussion; and 4) related text world, which included references or connections to other texts. The authors of this study conclude that student responses went beyond their own personal responses with the text. A suggestion from this study is that students' responses may be more influenced by their social experience rather than their cognitive development.

In her research about student responses to literature, Danielson (1992) analyzed the types of responses that students give when responding to literature. After 22 students were asked to write one question and one comment in their reading response logs about a chapter they read, Danielson identified seven types of responses: predictions, text-related comments, character involvement, personal experiences, language, author, and personal feelings. Danielson concludes that students' comments were honest and personal and showed evidence of students' comprehension and enjoyment of the story. She further concludes that these written responses "gave structure to the literature discussion groups and enabled students to participate in their community of readers" (p. 380).

Quality Discussion

The use of discussion in the classroom can be supported for various reasons. Larson (1995) explains that discussion is useful in the classroom because it helps to develop thinking skills, students are exposed to multiple perspectives, and discussion builds knowledge. He stated,

> Through discussion, students explain their ideas and thoughts, rather than merely recount, or recite, memorized facts and details. During discussion, learners are not "passive" recipients of information that is transmitted from a teacher. Rather, learners are active participants. As they interact during the discussion, students construct an understanding about the topic (p. 10)

Almasi and Gambrell (1996), in agreement with Larson, suggest that there are cognitive, socio-emotional, and affective benefits from discussion. They state, "From a cognitive standpoint, students may gradually internalize some of the interpretive behaviors that are associated with higher levels of thinking" (p. 15). Socio-emotional benefits include that students are more able to control their behavior, they learn how to interact with each other, and self-esteem increases as friendships develop. Finally, students are more likely to read after participating in literature discussion groups. There are many benefits for students who participate in literature discussion groups.

Since it has been established that discussion in the classroom is important, how can a teacher know if the discussion that s/he is observing is a quality discussion? Larson (1995) summarized three necessary conditions for discussion. First, it is important that every member of the group contributes a response from their unique perspective, opinion or understanding. Next, students in the group should listen to each other, consider what others are saying, and be responsive to what was said. Finally, the discussion must be guided by a purpose of developing the group's knowledge, understanding and/or judgement on the matter that is being discussed. When these components are present in a discussion, students are on their way to a quality discussion.

Washington State Education Reform

In the state of Washington there is a movement to reform education. The state has provided schools and teachers with documents which explain current expectations for educators and students. Teachers are learning new ways to incorporate these expectations in their classrooms. This project is a response to these expectations and two reform documents in particular were included as a basis for what was done. The Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (1997) provided guidance for analyzing what occurred during literature discussions, and Text Forms and Features: A Resource for Intentional Teaching (Mooney, 1998) directed my text selection for the literature discussion groups as well as formulating my reading program for the year. Understanding the importance of finding ways to incorporate these new expectations in the classroom, I have suggested communication and reading EALRs which could be met within the context of literature discussion groups.

A quality literature discussion for the purposes of this study meet several communication and reading EALRs. Specifically, a quality discussion meets the following EALRs:

- Communication 1.3: Students check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing.
- Communication 2.3: Students use effective delivery by using appropriate tone, pitch, and pace of speech
- Communication 3.1: Students will use language to interact effectively and responsibly with others.
- Communication 3.2: Students will work cooperatively as a member of a group.
- Communication 3.3: Students will seek agreement and solutions through discussion.
- Communication 4.1: Students will assess strengths and need for improvement.
- Communication 4.2: Students will seek and offer feedback to improve communication; offer suggestions and comments to others.

While communication EALRs are necessary for literature groups to function, I focused on looking for the following reading EALRs in student discussions as well.

- Reading 1.2: Students build vocabulary through reading
- Reading 1.4: Students will understand elements of literature –fiction such as story elements, use of humor, exaggeration, and figures of speech.
- Reading 2.1: Students will comprehend important ideas and details.
- Reading 2.2: Students will expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing information and ideas.
- Reading 2.3: Students will think critically and analyze authors' use of language, style, purpose, and perspective.
- Reading 3.3: Students will read for literary experience…to understand self and others
- Reading 4.2: Students will seek and offer feedback to improve reading.
- Reading 4.3: Students will develop interests and share reading experiences.

When a literature discussion group is able to meet many of the previous Essential Learnings and follows the discussion guidelines suggested by Larson, it will be considered a quality discussion for this study. The frequency at which these EALRs occur vary, but I expected to see evidence of these communication and reading EALRs in students' discussions.

As I become more aware of how I am meeting the EALRs in my classroom, I will become more confident that students are receiving the education that they are being promised by the state.

Significance of the Study

A study which analyzes the involvement of me as the teacher in literature discussion groups, and addresses how to effectively and efficiently implement literature discussion groups in a way that is manageable and beneficial to student learning is important for several reasons. First, this study adds to the existing research on the teacher's role in student-led literature discussion groups. Second, it provides evidence for how teachers can give students tools and interact with groups in order for groups to have successful literature discussions. Third, this study shows how literature groups as an instructional strategy can meet many of the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements. Teachers who find it a challenge to meet the numerous Washington State EALRs

will be glad to see how to combine several of these requirements into one instructional approach.

Methodology

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

There are several reasons that I selected a qualitative research design in this study. I was interested in getting a holistic picture of literature circles as they occurred within the classroom, and I was interested in the process and context in which this study took place. This qualitative study provides a more in-depth understanding of the processes that occur in the literature group setting. The data collection procedures involved field notes, audio tapes and transcribed discussions. Describing the groups and the process that occurred within them was an essential part of the study. Since I was interested in the process of literature groups and I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, this study fit qualitative criteria (Creswell, 1994). The nature of this research project did not fit the quantitative model even though I counted the number of reading EALRs achieved by students in conversations with and without my presence.

The design that was used for this study is a multi-case qualitative study. I observed six different literature discussion groups at the fourth and fifth grade level throughout the study. Data collection in the form of field notes, audio tapes and interviews occurred during the two rounds of literature discussions which occurred during six weeks in October through November and then six weeks in January through February. I analyzed the audio taped discussions from the six groups by looking for evidence of which reading EALRs were met in each discussion. I was interested in the frequency in which student comments matched specific reading EALRs. In addition to counting comments related to the reading EALRs, I analyzed the audio tapes by listening for comments that focused on conversation maintenance, off task remarks, comments about text support and the number of teacher comments made during the discussion. These four categories emerged during the coding of the conversations because

not every comment students made fit a reading EALR. Results and conclusions were based upon this analysis, field notes, and written interviews.

Setting and Participants

Students involved in this study were from my own fourth and fifth grade classroom, which was located in a town of about 60,000 in Washington State. This school did not qualify for Title I services, but it did have a Reading Recovery program available to some first grade students. The school population was 90 % Caucasian and consisted of higher to middle income families.

In my classroom there were 24 students at the beginning of the year. One student moved to a different classroom and another student joined our class later in the year. Twenty-one students were Caucasian, two were Asian American (one of whom was a student whose first language was not English), and one was a Black American. Six of these students were in my classroom last year, and out of the 24 students, 17 had previously participated in literature circles.

In my classroom students participated in a reading and writing workshop each afternoon. The afternoon schedule is described in the following table.

Table 1
Classroom reading and writing schedule

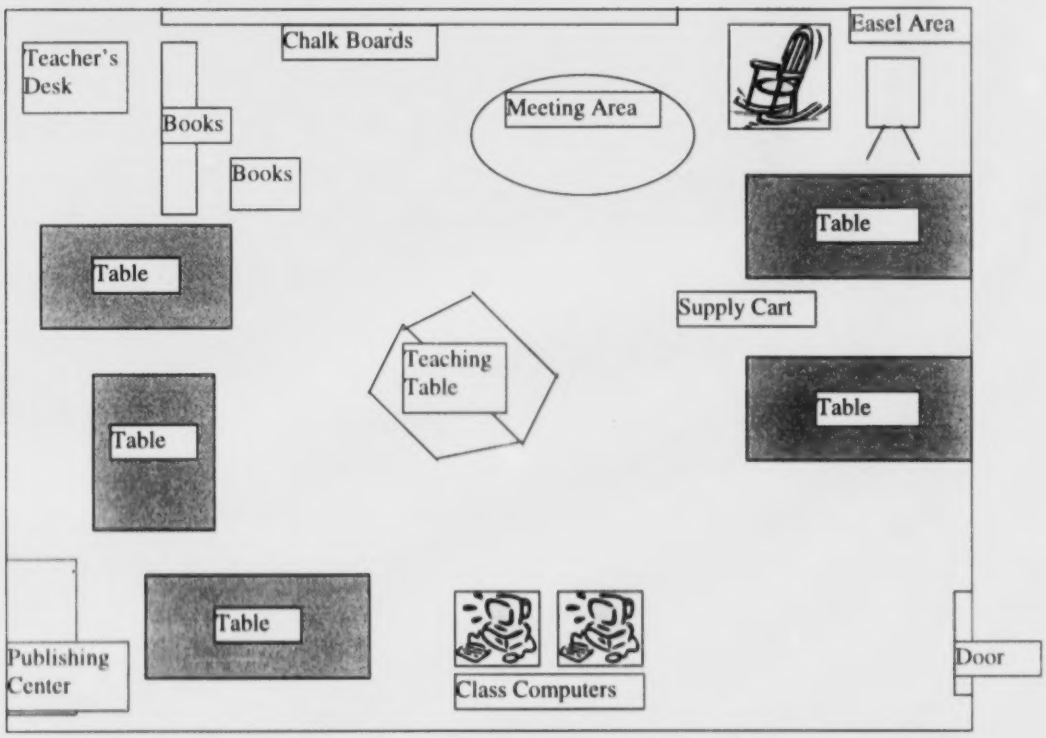
Time	Description of Reading and Writing Activities
12:30	Read aloud by teacher
12:50	Modeled writing by teacher
1:00	Reading and Writing Workshop Round two literature discussion groups met between 1:30 and 2:30 during workshop time
2:30	Recess
2:45	Round one literature discussion groups met during this time

Students followed a reading and writing workshop plan (Appendix F) to organize their choices during this time. The choices involved reading, writing focused on the writing process, spelling, and written responses in reading response logs.

The purpose of reading and writing workshop was for students to make independent choices in reading and writing while I conferenced with writers and taught groups of students specific reading and writing skills. I taught students what was expected for each activity during workshop through mini-lessons, and gradually allowed students to follow the workshop plan in order to choose the order in which the work got accomplished. The expectation was that students were focused on the activity that they chose. Quiet talking was allowed if it was on the topic of what students were working on and students were encouraged to conference with one another on writing. I monitored students' work by roving around the room approximately every twenty minutes to monitor what students were doing. If students were off task, they were asked to move or make a different choice.

A classroom map (Figure 1) shows how the environment was organized. Students had assigned seating at group tables (4-6 to a table) but could choose a different place around the room to work during workshop time. When students met in their literature circle discussion groups, they decided whether to sit on chairs or on the floor so that they were all sitting at the same level. This ensured that students had more effective physical group dynamics. Groups that met with me sat at the teaching table in the middle of the room. Students brought their books and response logs with them in order to be prepared. If students came to group unprepared, they missed a discussion. Missing occurred only three times during both sets of literature circle groups. Finishing their responses and reading was made a high priority, and students were given two mornings a week to read for approximately 20 minutes in addition to regular workshop time.

Figure 1. Diagram showing the layout of the classroom in which students worked in my classroom



Families were notified at the beginning of the year that I was going to be focusing on literature groups during the school year and including their students in a research study. Letters were sent home to families (Appendix B) in order to secure permission to have their children in the study even though students' names would be kept confidential.

In order to understand the group dynamics in the literature circle discussions, Table 2 and 3 show the types of students who participated in each literature circle group. Students are identified as highly capable learners (HCL), high, medium, or low level readers. I decided on their reading level based upon their DRP scores (TASA, 1995) and running records. I also rated their behavior as either challenging or cooperative because their behaviors affected the outcomes of the study. Challenging students were students who required frequent redirection during workshop time, and cooperative students were

students who rarely required redirection. Finally, I also mention what gender students were. M stands for male and F for female.

Table 2
Description of students in literature circle groups: round one

Book Title of Group	Gender	Behavior	Reading Level
Charlie and The Chocolate Factory	M	Challenging	HCL
	M	Challenging	Low (English as a Second Language)
	M	Challenging	High
	M	Cooperative	Medium
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	Medium
The Castle in the Attic	M	Cooperative	High
	M	Cooperative	HCL
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	Low
	F	Cooperative	Medium
	F	Cooperative	Medium
The Fledgling	F	Cooperative	HCL
	F	Cooperative	HCL
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	Low
The Rats of Nimh	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	Medium
	F	Cooperative	High
	M	Cooperative	High
	M	Cooperative	HCL
	M	Cooperative	Medium

Table 3
Description of students in literature groups: round two

Book Title of Group	Gender	Behavior	Reading Level
Stepping on the Cracks Group A	F	Cooperative	High
	M	Challenging	Medium
	M	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	Medium
	M	Challenging	High
Run Away Home	F	Cooperative	Low
	F	Cooperative	HCL
	F	Cooperative	HCL
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	High
Number the Stars	M	Cooperative	Medium
	M	Cooperative	HCL
	M	Cooperative	HCL
	F	Cooperative	Medium
	F	Cooperative	High
	F	Cooperative	High
Stepping on the Cracks Group B			
	F	Cooperative	High
	M	Challenging	High
	M	Challenging	Low (ESL)
	M	Cooperative	High
	M	Cooperative	Medium
	F	Cooperative	Medium

How Groups and Books Were Assigned

The books selected for this study were chosen based upon several factors. During round one the book selections were from the fantasy genre. I wanted the first round of literature circles to involve a genre of books that students were more familiar with and my students had previous experience with fantasy books. I chose fantasy titles by looking at my school library's collection of book sets available for group work. During round two, I selected the genre historical fiction since it was on the list for fourth grade students in Text Forms and Features (Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1998), a state suggested curriculum. I did

not select books from the same historical time period since the library collection did not provide that option.

Students were assigned to book choices after they listened to a variety of book talks on a particular genre of books. After listing their top three choices for books that they wanted to read, I made the final decisions about who was going to be in which literature discussion group. Factors for deciding who would be in the first round of literature circle groups included difficulty of text and student interest. It was preferable that students could read the text independently, but if students were interested in reading a more challenging book, other strategies for reading were applied such as peer reading, one-to-one reading assistance with a teacher or parent volunteer, or audio tapes of the readings.

Students' reading ability were assessed according to two main assessment tools. The first was a Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test (TASA, 1995) which was required during the fall and spring by the school district. The second assessment for student reading performance was in the form of running records, which were taken approximately every month for struggling readers. Reading assessments provided me with information about the level of support that students would require in order to read and participate in the literature circle group.

During round one of literature circles (October through November) I selected two groups to observe as a non-participant observer. The way that I selected these groups was to pick the group that had the most challenging behaviors in it, and the largest group. The reason I selected these two groups was because I wanted to allow the two other professional educators who were working in my class to work with groups that would be more cooperative. Also, I wanted to see what it would take for the group reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory to have a quality discussion since there were three students with challenging behaviors in it.

Two of the other groups worked with additional professional educators from the university at which I was studying. In one group, the teacher acted as a non-participant coach. In this role, she listened to the group's conversations and

gave them feedback at the end of the conversations about what went well. She often gave the group instruction on specific skills before or after their discussion. The fourth group worked with a teacher who acted as a group participant. In her role, she brought her own response to the group and also took the opportunities to teach story concepts. Literature discussions lasted for approximately thirty minutes a discussion, and students met twice a week for a six week period. Table 5 shows the teachers' roles during round one of literature circles.

Table 5
Teacher Role in Literature Circle Groups

Round	**Group Book Title**	**Teacher Role**
Round One (genre: fantasy)	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Non-participant Observer
Round One	Castle in the Attic	Non-participant Observer
Round One	The Rats of Nimh	Non-participant Coach
Round One	The Fledgling	Participant
Round Two (genre: historical fiction)	Stepping on the Cracks	Participant
Round Two	Stepping on the Cracks	Participant
Round Two	Run Away Home	Participant
Round Two	Number the Stars	Participant

Since I had the opportunity to work with two other professionals in my classroom I use their involvement in part of my findings as well.

After the first set of literature groups and a six week break to focus on informational text reading strategies and student research and writing projects, I reassigned students to new literature discussion groups. This second set of literature circle groups is referred to as round two. During round two, I assumed a more significant role in the groups. I met with each of the four groups every other time they met and acted as a participant who sometimes facilitated the groups. My goal was to be an equal member of the group, but I did hope to influence the group to think about concepts that they may not have thought about if I had not been present. The following table shows the research time frame and design more clearly.

Table 4
Reading Schedule for the Year

Reading Schedule 1999 - 2000	
September:	Reading strategies, prepare for literature groups
October - November:	Round One of Literature Groups
December - January:	Informational text reading strategies, student research and writing projects
January - February:	Round Two of Literature Groups
March :	Poetry Focus
April - May:	Round Three of Literature Groups
May - June:	Informational text reading, research and writing projects

Researcher's Role

As the teacher and researcher, I taught students what was expected of them when participating in literature circle groups before round one. The teaching occurred during the 12:30-1:00 time slot when I read aloud and modeled writing before reading and writing workshop began. I began the year by reading Tuck Everlasting (Babbitt,1975) (see Appendix C for student book list). After reading aloud, I taught a specific skill and modeled it through writing on a writing easel. See appendix D and E for brief descriptions of the lessons taught to prepare students for literature discussion groups. Six lessons focused on written response and six lessons focused on discussion strategies. In addition to these twelve lessons, students were given more opportunities to practice and apply the skills taught in the lessons before they were put into literature groups for round one. The two other professional educators helped me teach these lessons much of the time. Lessons that I did with the other teachers usually involved modeling of good discussion strategies.

My ideas for what to teach during the mini-lessons came from the book Literature Circles and Response (Hill, Johnson & Noe,1995). Once students were in literature circle groups, my ideas for continued mini-lessons came from my observations of what happened during groups. For example, on one occurrence I noticed that a group was having difficulty sustaining a conversation about their book. As a result, I had them sit in a circle around another group who had better

skills in this area to observe how they talked about their book. One time I noticed that students' conversations did not last very long. In response to this observation, I prepared and taught a mini-lesson on more strategies for sustaining a conversation.

The role that I took during the literature discussion groups varied with different groups. In the first round of literature groups I monitored two groups who facilitated their own discussions. I tried to be as uninvolved as possible, and suggested that groups pretend I was not there. However, there were times when I had to intervene due to loud arguments and lack of discussion focus. I then acted as a disciplinarian and facilitator in the group reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Dahl, 1964).

In the groups that I joined as a participant in January, I came to the group meetings prepared to discuss literature as a member of the group. I shared from my own literature log, and was quiet in order to allow students to discuss more. If the occasion arose, I gave students suggestions on how to have more effective discussions. I took the opportunity to ask probing questions during discussions which required students to give deeper explanations or support for their ideas. I also asked questions that I did not have the answers to in order to engage in real conversations with the kids about books.

Data Collection Procedures

The data that I collected in this study was in the form of audio tapes. I took field notes at the end of the day on the days that literature discussion groups met. A record of the mini-lessons and discussion strategies were important to help me remember what I taught on the days of the literature group meetings. Students were given a pre-survey in order to assess their previous experience with literature circles, and expectations for what they would learn during literature circles. Post surveys were given to students after round one and two in order to collect information about their participation in literature groups. These post surveys provided some information about students' involvement and enjoyment in groups. Students were surveyed at the beginning of the year and at the end of each round of literature circles to find out how they perceived what was

happening in the discussion groups, and to get an idea of what they thought about having me in their group (see Appendices M, N, O, & P).

Data Analysis Procedures

Student comments were coded and analyzed for which reading EALRs were met during discussions. The reading EALRs selected for analysis were those which might be met within the context of literature discussion groups. Although I did not know for sure if the reading EALRs selected would occur during discussions, I chose to listen for them on discussion tapes. In addition to the reading EALR categories, four other comment categories emerged as I listened to and coded the discussions. I noticed that two other types of comments that students made were for the purpose of maintaining conversation, or to support a comment by referring back to the text. I also coded off task remarks and any comments that I made during the discussion. These four categories of comments along with the reading EALRs were coded and analyzed for frequency of occurrence. Although I counted the number of comments that I made during discussions, I did not analyze the types of comments that I made because I was more interested in how my role in general affected the groups' discussion.

Sections of transcribed discussions provided examples or supported conclusions drawn from the data. Field and anecdotal notes assisted my write up about the literature discussions. Student interviews were analyzed for information about students' opinions and perceptions about literature groups. Charts and tables were constructed and included the frequency of EALRs and the date of the discussion.

Verification of Results

The results of the discussions were verified by having a colleague analyze and code several discussions. The results were similar and verified my findings. Also, after ten tapes were coded and analyzed, I randomly selected six more tapes to code and analyze. My findings from these six tapes were compared to what I found on the first ten tapes, substantiating my findings.

Results

Pre-Survey Results

A written pre-survey (Appendix M) was given to all students at the beginning of the year so that I could determine what they expected to learn during literature circles. The questions were open ended so that they would not be leading students in their answers. I found that students had many expectations for the learning that would occur in literature circles. Students expected to learn the following things:

1) 8 students said they expected to learn about how to cooperate and communicate about books
2) 7 students said they expected to learn about new books and what other people think of what they read.
3) 2 students expected to learn more about expressing themselves through talking or writing.
4) 2 students expected to learn more about reading.
5) 1 student expected to learn about responsibility.

When asked what part of participating in literature circles would be enjoyable, students said two main things. There were 14 students who mentioned that talking about the book would be the most enjoyable thing, while 7 students stated that reading the book would be their favorite part of literature circles.

The parts that students thought might be challenging about literature groups were:

1) 10 students mentioned concerns related to communicating with others in their groups.
2) 7 students stated that they were worried about getting the writing done in their response logs before each group meeting.
3) 5 students predicted that it would be difficult to stick to the assigned reading because it was too much or they wanted to read ahead.

This pre-survey gave me a lot of information about what students expected out of literature groups.

Post-Surveys Round One Results

Students were given a written survey (Appendix N) asking them what they learned, and what they considered to be the most challenging or enjoyable parts of literature circle groups after they had participated in two full rounds of literature circle groups. Twenty students took the survey and explained that they learned the following from literature circle groups:

- 11 students said that they learned more about cooperating and communicating about books.
- 7 students responded by saying that they learned more about writing a response to the book that they were reading.
- 1 student said that she learned more about how to choose a good book and understand it better
- 1 student did not comment

Comments on this post survey show that many of the students' expectations for learning were met. For example, eight students predicted that they would learn about communicating, and eleven students said that they did learn about communicating about books.

The most enjoyable parts to literature circles for students were:

- 10 students enjoyed the discussions the most
- 8 students enjoyed reading the books the most
- 2 students said that there was nothing enjoyable about literature circles

In students' written survey responses, there were several parts to literature circles that students mentioned as challenging:

- 8 students said that getting the reading or writing finished on time was most challenging
- 5 students considered staying on task, or staying focused during group time was the biggest challenge

- 3 students said that there was nothing challenging about literature circles
- 2 students did not comment
- 1 student said that it was challenging to predict what would happen next in the book
- 1 student said that literature circles were boring

Two other written post surveys (Appendix O & P) were given after the last literature circle meeting of round one and two. Although I asked many questions about what students learned and enjoyed about literature circles on these particular surveys, I will focus on students' responses about the teacher's role during round one of literature circles. Table six summarizes my findings from this survey.

Table 6
Post Survey Results: Round One

Book Title	**Teacher Role** (Defined in Type of Design Used section)	**What students enjoyed about group**	**Student suggestions for teacher**
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Non-participant Observer	1. 3 students enjoyed talking 2. 1 student enjoyed being with friends 3. 1 student enjoyed reading new books	1. 2 students said a teacher should be at the discussions 2. 2 students had no comment 3. 1 student said shorten the time
The Castle in the Attic	Non-participant Observer	1. 4 students enjoyed talking about the book 2. 2 students like reading the book	1. 3 students had no comment 2. 1 student said choose better books 3. 1 student said watch carefully 4. 1 student said encourage students to ask questions
The Fledgling	Participant	1. 3 students liked talking with friends 2. 1 student liked drawing responses	1. 2 students said don't talk too much 2. 2 students did not comment
Rats of Nimh	Non-Participant / Coach	1. 3 students said they liked talking about the book 2. 2 students said they liked reading the book	1. 3 students had no comment 2. 1 student said that there should not be cameras 3. 1 student said that the teacher should not talk during the discussion

An overall result from the student post surveys after round one is that students who were in groups with a teacher stated a desire to have less teacher input, while groups without a teacher stated a need for more teacher presence. Possible reasons for these results is that groups without a teacher needed more guidance during the first literature group of the year. Groups who met with a teacher during round one received the guidance they needed early on, yet may have needed more independence once they had some experience.

Post-Survey Results Round Two

After round two I gave students three written survey questions to answer. Students had the choice of whether or not to write their names on their survey answers. The questions were:

1) What did you like about literature circles?
2) What did you dislike about literature circles?
3) What was the difference in the discussions when the teacher was in the group or not in the group?

Students liked the following aspects of literature circles:

- 14 students liked talking about the book
- 7 students liked to read the books for group
- 3 students said that it helped them understand the book

Students disliked the following aspects about literature circles:

- 10 students did not like it when there were troubles during discussions such as interrupting
- 5 students did not like having to stick to the assigned reading - either it was too little or too much
- 6 students claimed that they did not like writing a response for every discussion
- 3 students did not like the books they were reading for group

To summarize student responses, students liked literature circles because they got to talk about the book and share their feelings and opinions. They did not like literature circles when their conversations did not flow smoothly, and they did not

like writing responses or having to slow down or speed up their reading for the purposes of the group.

Students were also asked to tell what the differences were in literature groups when I was and was not present during round two of literature circles.

When I was present...

- 10 students said that the conversations were more focused and on track
- 5 students stated that the assigned reading was more reasonable when the teacher was present
- 5 students said that they got more information or understanding about the book with the teacher
- 4 students claimed that discussions were longer with the teacher

Without me present during discussions, there were several benefits and downfalls that students mentioned.

Benefits of having no teacher

- 6 students mentioned that they felt more free to discuss topics that interested them related to the book
- 2 students said that the discussions were more fun

Downfalls of having no teacher

- 8 students said that the group got off task without the teacher
- 5 students said that the discussions were quicker
- 3 students said that the assigned reading was too much

The results of this survey show that students thought that I did have something positive to offer the group. They mentioned that I brought up things to think about, helped the group stay on task and made sure that the assigned reading was not too much. However, students said that they felt more comfortable, could talk more freely and that the discussions were more fun when I was not in their group.

In a final question that I asked students to answer after the last post-survey, I asked students to tell me if they would rather read a book by themselves

or read it with a literature group. I asked them to explain why. Out of 23 students who answered the question, 9 students preferred reading a book with a literature group, and 14 would rather read a book on their own. Of the 9 students who would prefer reading books in literature groups, one student was HCL, one was a high reader, five were medium readers and two were low readers. Most readers who preferred reading in a literature group said that the group helped them to understand the reading. Of the readers who preferred reading by themselves, 12 said it was because they want to be able to read as fast as they want and not have to slow down in order to discuss the book. One student said that she liked to keep her feelings to herself, and one said that there was too much reading. All of the students who said that they preferred reading by themselves were medium or high level readers, or HCL students. These findings help me to conclude that lower level readers prefer reading in literature circle groups, while higher level readers prefer reading alone. This finding makes sense because literature discussions slow down the reading and allow for a deeper comprehension of the book's details for low level readers. High level readers do not require as much support to gain a deep comprehension from the reading.

Observations and Analysis of Data

Coding and analyzing the audio tapes allowed me to listen more closely and notice behaviors and trends that occurred in students' conversations when I was and was not present. See Appendix R for the data collection sheet that I used for coding responses. Table 7 explains and provides examples of the four coding categories which emerged from the process of coding the students' conversations.

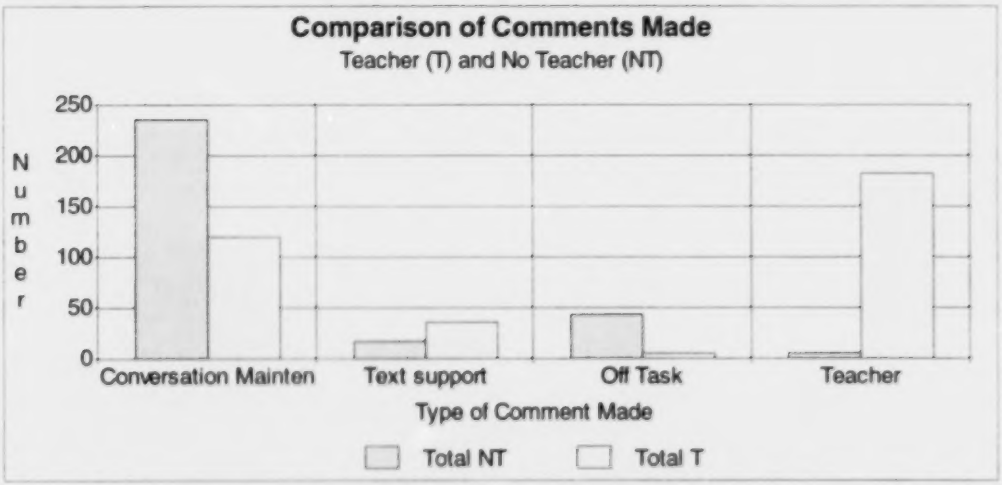
Table 7

Definitions and examples of coded categories

Code and Definition	Student Example
Conversation Maintenance: Comments which helped the flow of the conversation such as whose turn was. This category could also be called conversation facilitation.	"Who is going to go first?" "Okay, who wants to go next?" it
Text Support: Comments which involved students reading from the text to support their response.	"I'm on page ten and they just found the train..."
Off Task: Comments which strayed from conversation related to the book.	"Stop it you guys!" "You're ruining the rest of the group."
Teacher: Any comment made by the teacher during the conversation even if the teacher was not present during the discussion.	Teacher comments were not coded.

Figure 2 is a graph that shows the comparison of comments made during discussions in which the teacher was or was not present. This graph shows only the comments made under the four categories of teacher comments, off task remarks, conversation maintenance, and text support.

Figure 2. Graph showing the number of comments made during conversations with a teacher (T) and without a teacher (NT)



Some conclusions can be drawn from looking at Figure 2. In the category of conversation maintenance, there were 235 student comments made when I

was not present. When I was present, only 120 student comments were counted as conversation maintenance. These results show that I when I was present students spent less time making comments which maintained the conversation. When I was present, the conversation maintenance was more efficient.

An interesting finding is that I did 21 % of the talking when I was present in the group. I made a total of 183 comments during students' conversations that I was present in, while all student comments from the reading EALR categories and four additional categories added up to 705 comments. 183 of the 888 comments equals 21 percent. Almost one quarter of the comments made during the conversation were made by me.

Another observation from Figure 2 is that students made more comments in which they used the text to support their response, and there were fewer off task comments made when I was present compared to when I was not present. Altogether there were 17 text support comments when I was not present while there were 36 text support comments when I was present. This may be because I encouraged students to look back in their books to support comments that they made. Forty-three off task comments were counted when I was not present while only five were counted when I was present. This result matches with what I saw during student discussions. When I was present, I did not allow students to spend time off task.

In addition to looking at conversation maintenance, text support, off task comments and teacher comments, the number of comments that met specific reading EALRs were counted. Table 9 explains the reading EALRs in detail.

Table 9
Description of Specific Reading EALRs

Reading EALR	Student Example
1.2 Vocabulary Students build reading vocabulary by interpreting context clues and using dictionaries, glossaries, and other sources.	"What does that word mean?"
1.4 Story Elements Students understand elements of literature in fiction works. Students identify literary devices such as figurative language and exaggeration. Students understand story elements such as plot, characters, setting, point of view, problem and solution.	"Buster is just not a good hunting dog." (characters)
2.1 Story Details Students demonstrate comprehension of the main idea and supporting details and summarize ideas into their own words. Students connect previous experiences and knowledge when reading to understand characters, events, and information. Students make inferences and predictions based on the reading of the text.	"I predict that in the next five chapters they will find the boy dying of swamp fever." (prediction) "Didn't he fall down or something?" (story detail)
2.2 Analyze, interpret, synthesize Comprehension is expanded by analyzing interpreting and synthesizing. Students find similarities and differences in stories, understand relationships between parts of a text or between two simple texts, use logical sequence to accurately retell stories and order and/or sequence parts of text.	"I think that the boy won't die because it said in the introduction that he was her ancestor." (relationship between parts of text)
2.3 Analyze author's craft Students think critically about the author's purpose. Students separate fact from opinion, recognize different purposes and styles for writing, and apply information gained from reading to give a response and express insight.	"The author kept on talking about unimportant details." "The author goes right into the the story."
3.3 Literary Experience / Response Students read for literary experience to understand self and others.	"I think it's a very interesting book."

Reading EALR	Student Example
Literary Experience / Response Continued Students read, respond to, and evaluate a variety of traditional and contemporary literature, read a variety of literature representing different cultures, perspectives and issues, and understand different view of family, friendship, culture, and tradition found in literature.	"When you said the word stupid it reminded me of my dog Sheila."

Figure 3 show the results of coding conversations for specific reading EALRs.

Figure 3. Graph showing the types of comments made which meet specific EALRs during conversations with a teacher (T) and without a teacher (NT)

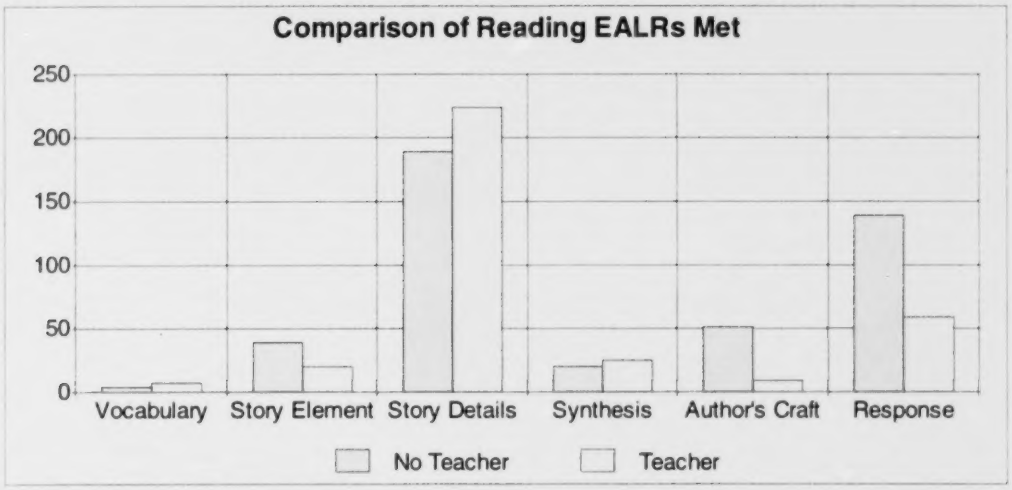


Figure 3 reveals general observations about the number of reading EALRs met during literature circles whether I was or was not present. The categories which had the least number of comments were reading EALRs 1.2 (vocabulary), 1.4 (story elements), 2.2 (analysis), and 2.3 (author's craft). This means that students did not spend a lot of time discussing vocabulary, understanding specific elements of literature, synthesizing or interpreting ideas, or thinking about the author's purpose. The categories which had the most comments were reading EALRs 2.1 (story details) and 3.3 (literary experience / response). This means

that students spent most of their time comprehending important ideas and details, and responding to the literature in ways that help them understand themselves and others.

Further analysis of the EALR categories show the difference in what happened when I was and was not present. When I was present students made more comments which involved the comprehension of ideas and details. There were 224 comments in this category when I was present compared to 189 when I was not present. A possible reason for this finding is that the discussions tended to last approximately 10 to 15 minutes longer when I was present. If I noticed that the conversation was dwindling, I brought up other things for the group to think about or prompted students to further discuss their questions that they wrote for the chapters they read.

In two other categories, there were a few more comments made when I was present. For EALR 1.2 (building vocabulary through reading), there were 4 comments made by students when I was not present, while there were 7 made when I was present. This shows that little vocabulary development occurs during literature circles the way the groups were run whether I was present or not. For EALR 2.2 (expanding comprehension through analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing ideas and information) there were 20 student comments counted under this category when I was not present, while there were 25 comments counted when I was present. This shows that students did not spend a lot of time synthesizing ideas between parts of the text or other texts.

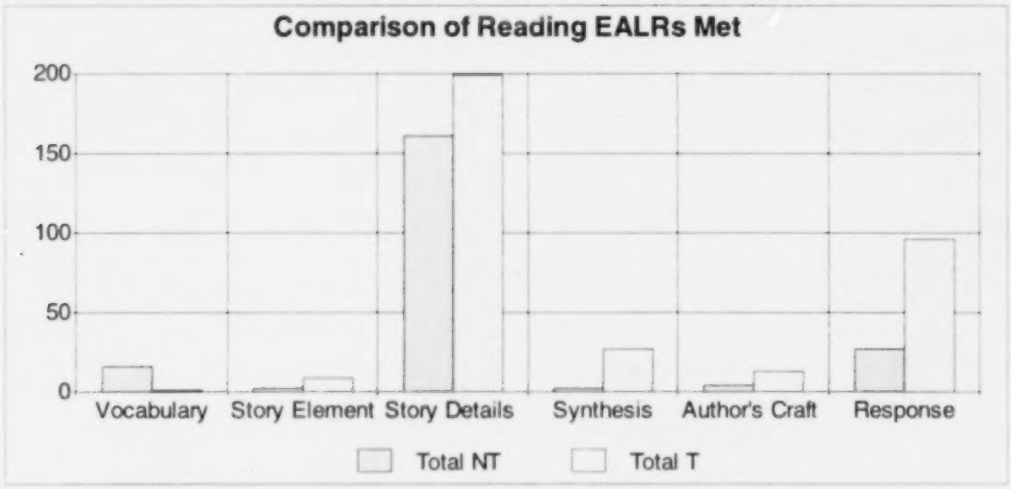
Three categories that students spent more time in when I was not present were 1.4 (elements of literature), 2.3 (author's purpose), 3.3 (understanding self and others). When it came to understanding elements of literature students made 39 comments when I was not present, while they made 20 comments when I was present. I cannot think of a reason why students discussed elements of literature more when I was not present, but this category did not have a lot of comments counted in either situation. When understanding the author's purpose, students made 51 comments when I was not present, and only 9 when I was present. I am surprised by this number because I promoted thinking about the

author's purpose and style. Finally, students made 139 comments related to understanding themselves and others when I was not present, while they made 59 comments in this category when I was present. I think that this occurred because I directed the conversation away from students' personal stories when I was present. When I was not present, they spent more time exploring what the book meant to them or telling personal stories.

Verification of Results

In order to verify the results presented from the first ten randomly selected tapes that I coded and analyzed, I randomly selected six more tapes to code and analyze. I wanted to see if the results would be similar to my first results. My findings can be summarized by the following graphs (Figure 4 & 5).

Figure 4. Graph showing the verification of results of the number of reading EALRs met during discussions with and without the teacher present



Although the numbers are different in my analysis of these six discussions, the pattern is the same as in Figure 3. Without looking at the comparison of what happened when the teacher was and was not present, EALRs 1.2 (vocabulary), 1.4 (story elements), 2.2 (analysis), and 2.3 (author's craft) were very low, while 2.1 (story details) was the highest and 3.3 (literary experience / response) more

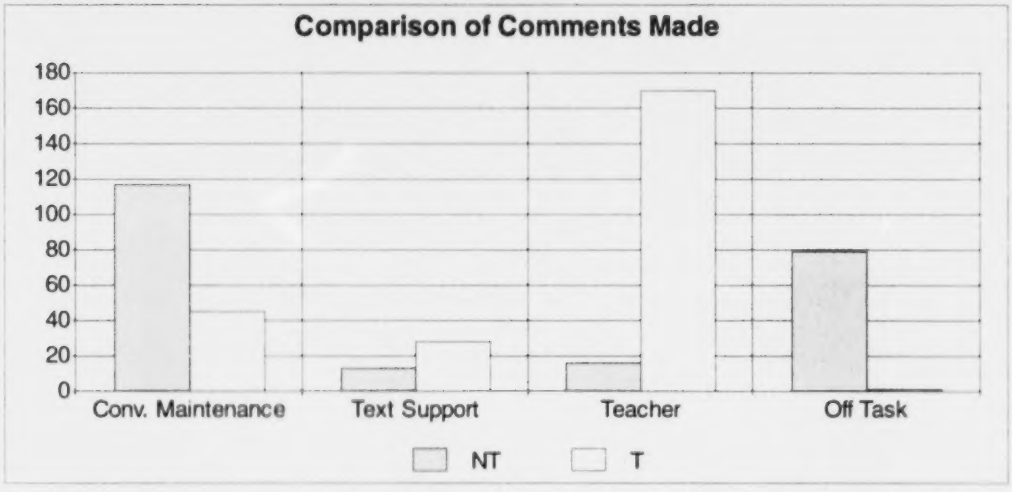
frequent. This reinforces the finding that during literature circles students spend most of their time discussing story details and their personal reactions to the text.

Students made 16 comments in the category of EALR 1.2 (building vocabulary) when I was not present, while only one comment was counted in this category when I was present. This does not match the previous analysis of conversations where more comments addressed vocabulary when I was present. Few comments about vocabulary were made in either situation. Based upon the way that I set up literature circles for this study, it seems that vocabulary development is rarely discussed.

In all other categories, (EALRS 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 3.3) there were more comments made when I was present in the discussion. Conversations tended to last longer when I was present which resulted in more comments in all categories. Student comments totaled 345 when I was present while there were 212 comments made by students that were coded specific to reading EALRs when I was not present.

The same verification process was used to analyze the four additional categories of comments (conversation maintenance, text support, off task, and teacher comments) made during discussions. Figure 5 shows a graph representing the numerical findings.

Figure 5. Graph showing verification of results for types of comments made when the teacher was and was not present



Verification mirrors the patterns of the previous results. Under the category of conversation maintenance, there were 45 student comments counted when I was present, while there were 117 comments by students counted when I was not present. This reinforces the result from the first set of data by showing that students did less conversation maintenance when I was present than when I was not present.

In the category of text support, there were 28 comments made by students when I was present, while there were 13 comments made when I was not present. This shows that students used more text support when I was present. This finding matches the first analysis of conversations.

It was clear again that there were more off task remarks made when I was not present than when I was present. There were 79 off task remarks when I was not present, while there was only one when I was present. These numbers show that off task comments were a problem when I was not present; 79 is a large number, especially compared to one.

The total number of comments made by students in this set of data was 419 when I was present, while 421 student comments were counted when I was not present. It appears from these numbers that there was not a difference in the

general length of the conversations when I was and was not present. However, there were 79 off task comments in discussions that I did not sit in on, so there was a smaller number of on task comments when I was not present. When I was present in the discussions, I made 169 comments.

The total number of comments made was 588. Since I made 169 comments out of 588 total comments, 29 % of all comments made during the discussions when I was present were made by me. Both percentages of the comments that I made are close since the first set of data showed that I did 21 % of the talking, while the second set of data showed that I made 29 % of the comments. Approximately one quarter of the comments made when I was involved in the literature circle discussions were made by me.

Examples of Discussions Round One

During round one of literature circle groups, I encountered different outcomes when I was not present in the groups. The group reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory had many difficulties in staying on task and focusing on the book. I spent a lot of time with this group facilitating their discussions and helping them to develop more independence in their discussions. Here is an excerpt from their very first conversation which illustrates the difficulties they had beginning literature circle discussions without me present.

Conversation 10/5/99 Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

K = Kyle L = Luke P = Pamela J = Jenny I = Ian
(Names have been changed on all transcripts)

After beginning the conversation by having several students read their summary of the chapters they read and response to it, the students begin arguing...

J: Can you just put that away? (audio tape recorder) (Kyle blows into it and giggles) Let's go tell...
P: Kyle, please..
K: Okay, all right.
L: Fart in it (the audio tape)
J: You guys!
I: He said fart in it.

J: You guys, this is recording!
(I am not sure who said these next statements)
Yeah
You guys
Quiet!
(giggling, shhhs, etc.)
J: Read, okay.
K: Mrs. Alwood! (I was coming over to their group)
They're just...Luke, he's just..
P: They're talking in the recorder.
I: Okay, it's recording!
Teacher: The one suggestion that I can give you is to pretend that it's not there. (the recorder)
I: Yeah, I don't want to be in this group!
K: Yeah, why don't you just get out?

The audio tape recorder clearly presented a problem for this challenging group at first, but that was not the only problem this group encountered. They also had problems respecting each other. For example, one student told another to get out of the group. After hearing this conversation, I decided to facilitate the next one. Eventually I was able to allow students who were a part of this group to act as facilitator and I gave them more independence. This group experienced more success later on, yet it never reached the same quality as other groups who met without me. This group functioned best when one of the students in their group acted as the facilitator, while other groups did not always require a facilitator.

In contrast to the group reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, the group reading A Castle in the Attic talked calmly and stayed focused on the book conversation from the very beginning. After listening to the conversation of The Castle in the Attic from October 26th in which I was a non-participant observer, I noticed some interesting approaches that the students took in order to extend their conversation. At the beginning of the discussion, the students read their responses from their response logs and had short conversations between responses. Then they spent several minutes discussing what chapters to read for next time and who would be the next leader. Next I told them that they had five more minutes for their discussion. The students did not know what to talk about,

but after about one minute they decided to share their favorite and least favorite parts of the book so far (they only had one more discussion time left at this point before they finished the book).

Once they began sharing about their favorite and least favorite parts, their discussion deepened into an analysis of the author's writing style and how it affected their enjoyment of the book. Comments such as, "[The author] kept on talking about unimportant details," "Some of the chapters did not have very much excitement," "The author goes right into the story," show how they discussed the author's writing pattern. "Flat, flat, boom!, flat, flat, boom!" is how they described the pattern. They stated that the author wrote several boring chapters and then an exciting one. After students realized that it had been five minutes more, someone wanted to stop, but another student stated, "But you guys, we have a really good discussion going now." This group showed an awareness of quality discussion, and dug deeper into the content of the book by analyzing the author's purpose and style.

I did not have the opportunity to listen to this conversation until later during my analysis of it, but if I had heard the discussion sooner, I would have asked the students what made their conversation better when they began talking about their favorite and least favorite parts. My conclusion is that once the students read their response logs, this particular group dug deeper to think about what to talk about. It is possible that the response logs were limiting for this group because once they stopped reading the response logs, they began discussing the author's purpose. Another possibility is that one student's comment from his or her response log sparked this discussion.

Examples of Discussions Round Two: Teacher Present

The final discussion for the group that read the book Number the Stars (Lowry, 1989) serves as an example of how a conversation unfolded during my presence as the teacher and participant. I noticed as I listened to the tape recording of our session that the students did some of the conversation maintenance by beginning the conversation, but I did most of it later on. Although I handled a lot of the conversation maintenance, students' comments

outnumbered my comments. The number of student comments was 224 while I made 75 of the comments, or 25 % of the total comments made in the group. In general, I noticed that all students shared their response to the book and that when I made comments they were based upon authentic questions that I had as a participant of the group. Some of the comments that I made during this discussion were related to details about the text, conversation maintenance, summarizing what students said, or asking questions to provoke discussion. Many comments that made up 25% of what I said were short and either restated or agreed with what students said.

I noticed that the comments I made reflected a balance in what I added to the conversation. I did not direct the entire conversation, but I acted as a group participant who tended to facilitate the conversation.

After coding the comments that students made during the discussion, I noticed again that a large number of comments were related to comprehending story details and reading for literary experience. When students made comments focused on comprehending important ideas and details they discussed topics such as where certain spots were on a map, the number of times the handkerchief from the story could have been used, and details about the character Peter's parents. When students made comments which involved reading for literary experience, they began responses with comments such as...

I thought it was good that...

I can't believe that...

This book was very sad.

If I were Anne Marie I would have...

It was funny when...

One girl's comment that illustrates her personal response to the story was, "I want to die like Peter, proud of what I did. I don't want to be scared and I want to know that my family is not worried about me because they know I am not scared." She identified with the character and gained a deeper understanding of who she was because of reading the book. According to Vandergrift's classification of responses to literature, this comment is an evaluative one which is the highest

level of response. Evaluative comments show a judgment based upon personal and moral criteria. She applauded the decision of the character Peter in the book to stand up for a cause and be brave. Her response showed that she wanted to die in the same way with the same honor that he did. This conversation shows that when I acted as participant students had a quality discussion with zero off task comments, rich discussion of story details, and personal reflection on the book.

Differences Between Round One and Round Two

Differences between round one and two literature circle implementations demonstrate the learning that took place for me in how to instruct students. During round one I allowed students to read a book even if they had read it already, without considering how this might affect the quality of discussion. After round one I realized that when students had already read the book they were not as interested in predicting future events in the book since they knew what was going to happen next. Reading a book that they had already read appeared to detract from the group discussions.

Another factor that I did not consider during round one was the importance of balancing the number students with challenging behaviors between groups. After the first discussion of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory I realized that I had made a mistake in grouping because three students who had difficulties staying on task were in that group. The first day of discussions one student said that he did not want to be in the group because he often got into trouble with another student. A second student asked the group to vote on whether or not they wanted him in the group. Although I intervened to keep this group intact, students were relieved when the book was finished. They appeared to be happier with their experience during round two when they were in a group that had a balance of student behaviors.

During round two I required that all students read a historical fiction book that they had not read before, and balanced the number of students who exhibited challenging behavior. During the first meeting of round two I passed out books, explained the role that I was going to take with the group (read along,

share my response, be a part of the group but teach or intervene when necessary) and talked about the history that related to the book. This gave the group a more common knowledge base when starting the book in understanding how the history would affect the story. This opening discussion gave students information about the topic and helped develop interest and understanding about the book.

After round one I realized was that there were several students who needed more support in order to finish their books. During round one there was inconsistent one on one adult help for students to complete their reading, or I allowed groups to read together outside of the classroom. These two options did not always help students finish reading. I noticed that the group reading The Fledgling had the option to read along with an audio taped recording of their book. This experience appeared to have a positive effect on one student who struggled to finish reading. In response to this event, during round two I audio taped most of the chapters from Stepping on the Cracks and Number the Stars with the help of a classroom parent. Several students listened to the tapes on a consistent basis and were more confident in their discussions and their written responses.

Another support that I provided during round two for students who struggled with finishing the work required for literature group before their group met was to have one-on-one reading conferences with students to check their comprehension. During a comprehension check I asked the student to tell me about what s/he had read. Since I had read the book also, I assessed how well the student comprehended what s/he read. At times when students needed more support in order to understand what they read, I taught them specific reading strategies to help them comprehend the text independently. One strategy that worked well was for students to re-read sections of the book that were challenging for them. One student responded well to this strategy. During one of these conversations I realized that she did not understand that it was acceptable to return to the text to support her written response. I told her that successful readers refer to the text in order to support their ideas or to check for

understanding. She asked, "It's okay to do that?" I assured her that it was often necessary to do this to support one's response to the text.

Answers to Guiding Questions

A final discussion related to the original guiding questions will conclude the results.

How does my presence as the teacher, or the lack of my presence, affect students' literature circle discussions? The answers to these questions is that it varies, depending upon the students' learning strengths and needs. If I provide too much support to groups that do not need as much support, it can stifle their independence. If I leave a group alone that is struggling to stay focused, it will waste their learning time because they will spend all of their time arguing or fighting. If I work to provide the appropriate amount of support for students based upon assessment and observation, students will be able to have independence and support at the same time.

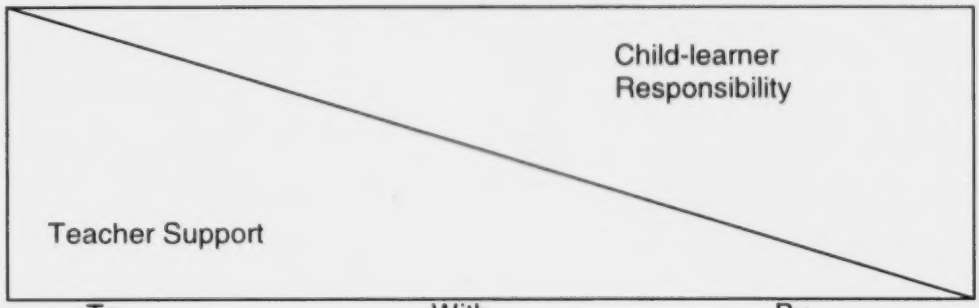
The amount of support required by the teacher is not the same for every group. My research shows that literature circle groups performed differently when I was not present. For example, the group reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory made more off task remarks and fewer comments under specific reading EALRs than the group reading The Castle in the Attic when I was not present. Factors which caused the group reading Charlie and the Chocolate Factory to struggle may have included that the group was composed of more students who had trouble staying on task than the group that performed well, book selection, students' skill at asking questions to bring to group for discussion, and students' comfort level with communicating with others. These factors were not formally analyzed, but deserve mention since they could have affected the study's outcome.

To summarize the answer to the question of how my presence affects students in literature groups, Mooney's (1990) chart visually demonstrates students' need for teacher support in literacy. At one end of the chart the teacher provides all of the support, while at the other end of the chart, the teacher

provides no support. Most groups fall somewhere in between these extremes. Groups may need help facilitating their discussions, making their discussions last longer, or deepening the level of discussion in their group. There is a range of teacher support needed for the scope of possible group dynamics. Table 13 is a reproduction of Mooney's chart showing the range of teacher support that students may need in different situations.

Table 13

Levels of teacher support in reading and writing



To	With	By
Talking to children	Talking with children	Talking by children
Reading to children	Shared reading	Independent reading
Writing to and for children	Guided reading	Independent writing
	Language experience	
	Writing with children	

"This figure illustrates the cyclical nature of learning and the independence which is part of every developmental stage. The diagonal line shows the amount of support needed by the learner over time" (Mooney, 1990, p. 12). Mooney's (1990) chart shows that there is a range of teacher support that students can receive. Teachers need to assess students in their classroom in order to determine the level of support that is required by students in order for them to perform well in literature circles. Mooney's (1990) model of teacher support matches the findings of my research study. While some groups required more support, others were able to function well without my presence.

While patterns in the data collected indicated that when I was present conversations lasted longer, and there were fewer off task comments, when I was not present some students felt that conversations were more fun and comfortable.

Having independence can be fun for the students and teacher if students are given proper amount of support. However, too much independence too soon can cause negative results such as discussions that stray from the topic or off task behavior by students. The more support the teacher gives, the better students will become at reading, writing and discussing, however, teachers need to assess students' strengths and needs and guide students toward independence.

Is it possible to monitor all groups at the same time? The answer to this guiding question relates to the previous discussion -- it depends upon how groups are functioning and the level of support they need. Since some groups with more challenging behaviors have difficulties staying focused on the book discussion, they require more support and teacher attention. In this case, it would not be easy to monitor three other groups in addition to spending more time with one group. At the end of the year when students are better at using discussion strategies, it could be possible to have all groups meet at the same time. I would suggest that teachers monitor groups by looking for specific behaviors as the groups meet.

Also, since students will be leading the discussion and could have the tendency to get off track, they need an accountability system. This matches with what Stevens and Slavin (1995) state as one requirement of working in cooperative groups. Accountability could be achieved by having groups fill out a summary form about what they discussed, audio taping their conversations, having groups set goals and evaluate their achievement, or having individuals set goals and evaluate their achievement. With student accountability, monitoring more than one group meeting at the same time could be an effective way to run literature circles.

In addition to the groups' level of functioning, there are other factors that could help the teacher monitor more than one group at a time. If the teacher has read the book that students are discussing, it is easier to listen to the discussion for a minute and check the quality of students' discussion. In addition to reading the book, it helps to review high expectations for student behavior before literature circles meet.

What strategies help students develop more independence in literature circles? The results of this study showed that some groups functioned more independently than others. What caused them to be independent? Some groups benefited from having one group member act as the facilitator. The student facilitator monitored whose turn it was and prompted all students to share. This worked well for some groups. Some groups were able to take turns talking by passing around an object so that they could tell whose turn it was. If students got off track, the facilitator might say, "Wait, who has the bean bag?" or "Let's take turns." Other groups that functioned well independently used the strategy of starting the discussion with informal chat instead of beginning with reading from response logs. Groups who chatted first spoke highly of this method, and it appeared that these groups became better at more natural conversation, or conversation that flowed more smoothly.

Other skills that appeared to improve the quality of discussion and student independence included when students understood: what to say in order to keep a conversation going (conversation maintenance); how to ask questions that get your group talking; or how to use a teacher-made can of questions to keep the discussion going. These are some of the discussion strategies that seemed helpful to groups that I observed. I am sure that there are more discussion strategies that could improve the quality of discussion and increase independence.

Can students successfully achieve a number of the reading EALRs in the context of student-led literature discussion groups? How can I know when students have met those EALRs? What evidence can be used? While students frequently discussed story ideas and details (EALR 2.1) and their response to the text (EALR 3.3), they did not spend a large amount of time developing vocabulary, learning story elements, analyzing the author's purpose, or synthesizing information in the text. Reading EALRs that focus on story elements, deeper analysis, vocabulary development, and author's craft should be intentionally implemented in other ways in the classroom. A teacher who

understands the EALRs can emphasize them as they participate in the discussions. Keeping vocabulary words on book marks or providing experiences for students to compare texts are just two ways that teachers could meet additional EALRs.

The evidence for measuring if students have met specific EALRs during literature circles can be in the form of observational notes or anecdotal records. Teachers can count the number of times that students make comments related to specific EALRs during discussions. Students' reading logs provide an opportunity for teachers to assess what reading EALRs students understand as evidenced through written responses.

Conclusions

Helping Students Develop Independence

One thing that I noticed throughout literature circles this year was that students functioned more independently when they enjoyed the book that they were reading. When I was excited about the book selections, the students were excited about the books. My enthusiasm appeared to rub off on groups, which appeared to help students have higher quality discussions, even when they met independently. It makes sense that groups that were excited about their books would have more to talk about. When I pre-read the selections and picked the best books it helped create enthusiasm.

In addition to creating enthusiasm, reading along or pre-reading the book helps the teacher to conference with students in order to monitor individual comprehension. When students have better comprehension of the books that they are reading, conversations have a greater possibility of depth than if students do not understand what they are reading.

Giving students choice about what they read is helpful in creating excitement for reading, but I found that choice is not more important than the group dynamics. Groups with more than two students with challenging behaviors were less successful than groups that were more balanced in behavior.

Suggestions for the teacher's role

The teacher's role is to provide the appropriate amount of support to students based upon their strengths and learning needs. An important beginning role for teachers is to set up literature groups by considering how to balance behaviors within groups. Teachers need to support students in reading by conferencing with students, providing audio tapes or adults to read with students, or arranging reading partners to read together. Providing feed back on the quality of students' responses in their response logs (see written response scoring criteria, Appendix K) helps students to bring quality ideas to their groups to discuss. Teachers should intervene when students exhibit behaviors that show they are having trouble staying on task or are unable to sustain conversations beyond simply reading responses from response logs. In addition to these suggestions, I have listed additional ideas for support that teachers can provide for students. Teachers can also...

- Join the discussion group as a coach. Teach a skill before the discussion, assess what students are doing during the conversation, and provide specific feedback after the discussion.
- Help students set goals based upon the feedback that you provide.
- Join the discussion group as a facilitator. Encourage all students to listen, share and ask questions. Throughout the discussion, provide specific examples of what students are doing well.
- Join the discussion group as a participant. Model to students how to listen, ask questions, respond and refer back to the text for examples and clarification.
- Provide support for students who struggle with writing a response to literature. Talk with them about what they think about the book and record their ideas as they talk, or have them write down what they told you. Encourage students by letting them know that their ideas and opinions are important to share.

These suggestions along with consistent assessment of student performance should help teachers know their learners in order to provide the appropriate amount of support and guidance.

The Value of Literature Circles in the Classroom

Literature circles can not be the only reading instruction that occurs in the classroom. Students need specific instruction about reading strategies related to many genres of text including fiction and informational text. While literature circles are only one part of a reading program, there are many benefits to using them as an instructional strategy. Students learn how to communicate more effectively with others, how to sustain discussions about books, how to use the text to support their opinions and feelings, and benefit from group support in order to more fully comprehend the book. These learning benefits match students' survey responses which indicated their expectations for what they thought they would learn in literature circles this year.

Once students know how to work as a group in the format of literature circles, this group interaction can carry over to other areas of study. For example, students can read short pieces related to other subjects that they are learning about and discuss specific concepts or ideas that teachers want to emphasize in similar group settings. I noticed that the skills students learned in literature circles carried over to other areas of study in my classroom. This was a positive benefit that I had not considered before beginning the research.

Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this study were limited to the effect of the teacher's role in literature circle discussion groups. Future research could consider whether or not there is a difference between homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. I noticed that several students felt frustrated when other students wanted to read more or less than they did. I wonder if this frustration would be minimized if groups were more homogeneous in ability?

Another idea to consider is whether or not there is a difference in the quality of written response or discussions when different genres are read. Do

certain genres of books lend themselves to better discussions than others? This question came up because round one focused on fantasy, while round two was based upon historical fiction books.

One concern that came up during this study was that all students were not reading books at their reading levels. Several students required a lot of support to finish the reading. I wonder what would happen if books were well matched to students' reading levels? Is there a way to do that given the range of reading levels in one classroom? If one student was at a level that was a lot lower than other students, how could a literature group be based upon students' reading levels? What would the difference be if students did not need to rely on teachers for audio tapes or other supports?

Other studies might consider how teachers could incorporate other teaching points in literature circles. For example, could teachers teach reading strategies, vocabulary development, story elements, or other components of a reading program in the context of literature circles? I wonder if providing additional prompts for students to respond to would allow teachers to teach more concepts or achieve more reading EALRs during literature circles?

A final idea for further research could be to consider if groups function differently if they filled out a reflection and goal sheet after every discussion. How would consistent reflection and goal setting enhance student learning in literature circles? Would goal and reflection sheets provide the individual accountability that Stevens and Slavin (1995) mentioned as a necessary condition for cooperative learning? There are numerous possibilities for future research depending on researchers' interest and understanding of literature circle group processes.

At the end of this research journey, I am reminded that everything that teachers do in the classroom ought to be based upon one thing - the learner. Mooney (1990) states, "The most effective rhythm [of teaching] is continuous and simultaneous interacting, observing, modeling, interacting, responding, and encouraging. And the focus is always on the learners -- what they do, how they do and show it, and what they are striving to do; on what attitudes,

understandings, and behaviors they display" (p. 14). If teachers can keep this in mind no matter what they teach, learners will be well served. This process along with thoughtful reflection will enable both teachers and learners to be successful.

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Appendices

A. Reading and Writing Workshop Plan

B. Letters to Families

C. Instructional Strategies for the Teacher

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E. Student Survey: Beginning of the Year

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Appendix A

Reading and Writing Workshop Plan

Name:_____ Date:_____

Reading: Put a checkmark in the box when you have finished an activity. Record the title of the book you read.

- ☐ Monday _____
- ☐ Tuesday _____
- ☐ Wednesday _____
- ☐ Thursday _____
- ☐ Friday _____

Writing: Record what stage of the writing process that you worked in today, and the title or topic of your writing.

- ☐ Monday _____
- ☐ Tuesday _____
- ☐ Wednesday _____
- ☐ Thursday _____
- ☐ Friday _____

Spelling: After practicing your words, record the strategy that you used to practice them.

- ☐ Monday _____
- ☐ Tuesday _____
- ☐ Wednesday _____
- ☐ Thursday _____
- ☐ Friday _____

List your spelling words in this box →

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
*

Project work: List project work that you spent your time on this week.

- ☐ Monday _____
- ☐ Tuesday _____
- ☐ Wednesday _____
- ☐ Thursday _____
- ☐ Friday _____

My reading goal for the week is _____

_____

_____

My writing goal for the week is _____

_____

_____

Teacher comments about the week _____

_____

_____

Teacher signature _____

Student signature _____

Appendix B
Family Letters

Dear Families, September 1999

Some of you may know that I am working this year on obtaining my Master's in Education degree with a Concentration in Literacy from Western Washington University. My project will examine discussion in literature circles with fourth and fifth grade students. The final paper will reflect the quality of discussion during literature groups when the teacher takes on different roles in discussion groups. All confidential information will be protected. Names and places will be changed; no child will be identified by name.

This project will be directly related to the teaching that I always do in my classroom. I am continuously researching best practices for the classroom and implementing them into my reading instruction. In no way will this project be disruptive. Findings will be presented to Western Washington University faculty, and there is a possibility that this information may be published for educational purposes. However, it will not identify (school name) or your child. Some of the information that I collect will be in the form of audio or videotapes for my use only. Findings will be used solely for educational purposes.

Even though all information will be kept confidential, I need your permission to include your child in this project. Please feel free to contact me with further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Carol Alwood
Please return the bottom portion of this letter to school with your child.

Carol Alwood,
You have my permission to include my child in your project. I understand that audio and videotapes will be used to collect information, but they will only be viewed by the teacher for educational and research purposes. I also understand that all information will be kept confidential.

_____ _____

Parent(s) or Guardian(s) signature(s)

Dear Families, 2/8/00

As you know, a peer researcher and I are researching the effects of literature circles in the language arts curriculum. As an important component to our research questions, the written responses are an integral aspect of our final papers. We would like to photocopy some of the written responses provided by the students in their reading logs to illustrate some valuable points in our papers. All confidential information will be protected. Names and places will be changed; no child will be identified by name. WE will need your permission to copy this information. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

We are currently enjoying our second round of literature circles. Ask your child about how it is going. There is a lot of learning going on!

Thank you,

Carol Alwood

Please return the bottom portion of this letter with your child.

___I will allow my child's written response from their reading log to be copied for this study.

___I will not allow my child's written response from their reading log to be copied for this study.

Child's name:_____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix C

Instructional Strategies for the Teacher

Suggested Reading Mini-Lessons

Mini-lessons focused on reading attitude and motivation...

- Why read? Who reads? What types of things do we read in life? (genres and purposes for reading)
- Selecting a book that you're interested in
- Selecting a book that you can read - the five finger rule - if you make five or more errors on a page, it will probably be a frustrating book to read by yourself
- What are criteria for abandoning a book?
- What makes a quality book? (our classroom definition)
- Setting reading goals
- Keeping track of what you read - annual reading log

Mini-lessons focused on reading strategies...

- Skip a word and come back to it. Ask yourself, "What would make sense there?"
- Sound it out
- Finding chunks in the word
- Read around the word (context clues)
- Using reading strategies with a buddy

Mini-lessons focused on literature discussion...

- Why talk about books? Purpose: understanding the book through the sharing of ideas
- Writing about what you read: What can I say?
- Using text to support your ideas
- Writing letters to friends and Mrs. A about what you're reading
- Procedures for using my literature log

  Book Title: _____ Pages read: _____
  Question: _____
  Response:

- How to start a literature discussion
- How to keep a discussion going - strategies
  What makes a good discussion? Key elements on a poster

Appendix D
Mini Lessons and Tools for Teaching

Date of lesson ***Lesson description***

- September 13th: Introduce reading response logs
- September 14th: Expectations for written response
  Focus on your feelings prompts
- September 15th: How to use the text to support your response
- September 20th: Using your response log to help you discuss
  Whole class discussion about read aloud
- September 21st: Students practice discussing Time for Kids
- September 28th: Introduce more specific questions to respond to
- September 29th: What makes a quality response (design rubric)
- October 4th: What makes a quality discussion?
- October 5th: Skits of good and poor discussions
  *Students begin independent literature circle discussions
- October 7th: How to begin a discussion and keep it going
- October 12th: Model quality discussion, students watch for key elements to the discussion
- October 14th: Students practice grading a quality written response

Ideas for Mini-Lessons

Before literature circle groups are assigned for the first time:

- ❑ Introduce reading response logs
- ❑ Explain expectations for written response in reading logs, and have students help you create a scoring guide (rubric) for their writing
- ❑ Have students practice writing responses to books that they are reading independently in which they use the "focus on your feelings" prompts or the open-ended questions
- ❑ Use your read aloud book to model how to use quotes from the text to support a written response
- ❑ Have whole class literature circle discussions on the book that you are reading out loud and model how to refer back to the text to support a statement or opinion during a discussion
- ❑ Have students practice discussing responses to short pieces of text
- ❑ Teach students strategies for beginning a discussion such as…
  1. Begin by having an informal chat about the book
  2. Begin by reading from your response logs
  3. Begin by asking a question that you don't have an answer to
- ❑ Discuss criteria for what makes a quality discussion and hang it on a poster. For example…

Guidelines for a Good Literature Circle Discussion

- Remember to put your book down and look at the speaker
- Listen carefully and make appropriate comments when a group member finishes
- Make sure everyone in the group gets a chance to contribute and share
- Ask each other questions about your feelings towards the book and why

Have fun!

- **During** the course of literature circles, base your mini-lessons upon what you observe the students doing. Get more in-depth with students on strategies for written or oral responses in order to help students become better communicators and writers.
- **After** literature circle discussions encourage students to reflect upon their performance in group and have them set goals for becoming better communicators and thinkers. For example, some students may need to set goals to listen better, share more, or ask questions that get their group talking.
- **After** students are finished reading their book, have them do a book celebration project.

Response Log Layout

You need:

1. Today's Date
2. Title of the book you are writing about
3. Author
4. Chapter that you are discussing

Then you need to:

Summarize the main events of the chapter
Respond to the questions at the front of your journal

Focus on Your Feelings

Prompts for Writing a Response

I think...

I feel...

I wonder...

I wish...

If I were...

That reminds me of...

I noticed...

Prompts found on page 20 from the following resource:
Hill, B.N., Johnson & K. Noe, (eds.). (1995). Literature circles and response. Norwood: Christopher-Gordon.

Additional focus on your feeling prompts we added to the above list:

I thought...
I remembered...
I did not understand...
I liked...
I wasn't sure...
I didn't like...
I predict...
I understood...
I enjoyed...
I disliked...
I agree...
I disagree...
I prefer...
I would change...
I laughed when...

Open-ended Prompts for Oral and Written Responses

1. What incident, problem, conflict, or situation does the author use to get the story started?

2. What does the author do to create suspense, to make you want to read on to find out what happens?

3. Does the story as a whole create a certain mood or feeling? What is the mood? How is it created?

4. What idea or ideas does this story make you think about? How does the author get you to think about this?

5. Do any particular feelings come across in this story? Does the story actually make you feel in a certain way or does it make you think about what it is like to feel that way?

6. Were there any clues that the author built into the story that helped you to anticipate the outcome? Did you think these clues were important when you read them?

7. Did you have strong feelings as you read the story? What did the author do to make you feel strongly?

8. Are any characters changed during the story? If they are, how are they different? What changed them? Did it seem believable?

Appendix E

Student Survey: Beginning of the Year

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. What do you expect to learn by participating in literature circles this year?

2. What part of participating in literature circles do you think will be enjoyable? Why?

3. What part of participating in literature circles do you think will be challenging? Why?

4. What do you think you can learn about reading by talking about books with other students?

Appendix F
Student Post Survey Number One

Name:_____ Post Survey Date: _____

1) What did you learn by participating in literature circles this year?

2) What skills have you gotten better at as a result of literature circles this year?

3) What was the most enjoyable part of literature circles?

4) What was the most challenging part of literature circles?

Appendix G

Student Post Survey: Round One

Literature book I studied:_____
Date: _____

1) What did you enjoy most about literature groups?

2) What did you learn in your literature discussion groups?

3) What bothered you about literature group discussion time?

4) What would you keep the same about literature groups for next time?

5) What would you change about literature groups for next time?

6) How often did the teacher interact with your group?

7) What did the teacher do when she was with your literature group?

8) How often did you literature group discuss without a teacher present?

9) What did students do when they were in a group without a teacher present? did students take on certain roles?

10) Which did you prefer, having discussion with the teacher present or having discussions without a teacher present? Why?

11) How do you think discussions are different when a teacher is present?

12) What suggestions do you have for teachers who want to help students have quality literature discussions?

Appendix H

Student Post Survey: Round Two

1) What did you like about literature circles?

2) What did you dislike about literature circles?

3) What was the difference in the discussions when the teacher was in the group or not in the group?

Appendix I
Coding and Analysis Form
Essential Academic Learning Requirements - Reading

Reading EALRs	Evidence of EALR met during discussion
1.2 Build **vocabulary** through reading	
1.4 Understand **elements of literature** in fiction such as story elements, use of humor, exaggeration, and figures of speech	
2.1 Comprehend important **ideas and details**	
2.2 Expand comprehension by **analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing** information and ideas	
2.3 Think critically and **analyze authors' use of** language, style, purpose, and perspective	
3.3 Read for literary experience…to **understand self and others**	
Conversation Maintenance	
Teacher Comment	
Text Support	
Off Task Comment	

Appendix J

Sample of Coded and Analyzed Discussion

Essential Academic Learning Requirements - Reading

February 15th, 2000 Final discussion for Number the Stars

Teacher present

Reading EALRs	Evidence of EALR met during discussion
1.2 Build **vocabulary** through reading	
1.4 Understand **elements of literature** –fiction such as story elements, use of humor, exaggeration, and figures of speech	3 - We discussed the star as a symbol in the book
2.1 Comprehend important **ideas and details**	114 Wondering about Peter's parents Looking at map to locate where they would have been Talk about the number of times the handkerchiefs would have been used and how they would have been made
2.2 Expand comprehension by **analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing** information and ideas	20 Talked about earlier parts of the book (sequence) Compared book to other texts on same topic or by different authors Discussed the after word and how it helped you understand the book
2.3 Think critically and **analyze authors' use of** language, style, purpose, and perspective	8 Discussed difference between author's use of after word and epilogue Discussed the need for a sequel to the book
3.3 Read for literary experience…to **understand self and others**	55 I think it was good that… I'm glad that… I want to die like Peter… I can't believe that… This was a sad book If I were Anne Marie I would…
4.3 Develop interests and **share reading experiences**	I didn't end up counting this category because we were doing that just by having literature circles.

Off task remarks: 1 Conversation maintenance comments by kids: 18 Text support: 5

Teacher comments: 75

Appendix K

Student Book List

Babbitt, Natalie. (1975). Tuck everlasting. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Dahl, Roald. (1964). Charlie and the chocolate factory. New York: Knopf.

Hahn, Mary. (1991). Stepping on the cracks. New York: Avon Camelot Book.

Langton, Jane. (1980). The fledgling. New York: Harper & Row.

Lowry, Lois. (1989). Number the stars. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

McKissack, Pat. (1997). Run away home. New York: Scholastic.

O'Brien, Robert C. (1988). Mrs. Frisby and the rats of nimh. Littleton: Mass Sundance Publishers.

Winthrop, Elizabeth. (1985). The castle in the attic. New York: Bantam Skylark.

Appendix L

Written Response Scoring Criteria

Written responses were scored on a weekly basis. The maximum score was five. Students in my classroom helped create this scoring system after we talked about what made a quality response to literature. At the end of the year I made some changes and this is the final version of the scoring guide.

5 points Student's written response…

- Was four sentences or longer (1 point).
- Included text support with page number included (1 point).
- Went beyond, "Yes," "No," or "I liked it." (1 point).
- Showed the student's opinion or perspective (connection to the real world). (1 point).
- Considered the author's writing style or use of language

OR

Considered the story elements such as characters, plot or setting (1 point).